

Charles Davis's Critical Theology  
and  
Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesial Ethics:  
Discourse and Character and the Church's Political Action

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that both this thesis and the research upon which it is based are my own work.

James Francis



## Thesis Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the possibilities of endorsing the church's authentic political presence and action in the public sphere. Against the background of modernity, characterised as the age of critical reason, the exploration will focus on the programmatic theological responses to this background offered by Charles Davis's critical theology and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. For Davis's critical theology, authentic politics is a process of communication among fully individual subjects in freedom. For Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics, authentic politics demands that the church should not *have* a social ethic, rather its task is to *be* a social ethic. These theological responses to the contemporary social and cultural context broadly represent an appeal to critical reason, in critical theology, as opposed to an appeal to tradition, in ecclesial ethics. While the former position runs the risk of surrendering the distinctive voice and action of the church to the desert, the latter risks trapping the church in a sectarian ghetto. To this extent, critical theology and ecclesial ethics represent two theological sides of the so-called liberal-communitarian debate to be found in secular moral philosophical discourse. As such, Davis and Hauerwas have philosophical antecedents in Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics and Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue or communitarian ethics.

The thesis will argue, further, that to understand fully the implications of critical theology and ecclesial ethics for the political presence and activity of the church, they must be compared and contrasted. Firstly, this is because for discourse based critical theology like Davis's to be at all credible it must be able to meet the kind of challenges posed by MacIntyre and Hauerwas. Likewise, a 'communitarian' theology, such as Hauerwas's, must be able to answer the challenges of a dialogically reformulated, universalist, ethical theory of the sort envisioned by Habermas and Davis. Secondly, in exploring these challenges, with respect to Davis and Hauerwas, it will become clear that their respective positions actually generate compatible visions of integrity in the church's ministry and mission.

To substantiate this claim the thesis will argue that the communities of faith, typified by discourse in Davis's case and character in Hauerwas's case, should be tested against a control model of a standard ecclesiology. This model is distilled from an encounter between Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Free Church ecclesiologists. In so doing, the thesis will suggest that where Davis's community of discourse is strong on catholicity and unity it is weak on holiness and apostolicity whereas Hauerwas's community of character is strong on holiness and apostolicity but weak on catholicity and unity. In terms of fulfilling all the criteria of ecclesiality, therefore, Davis and Hauerwas should be seen as representing complementary rather than oppositional calls to a new vision, integrity and practice of and for theology and the ministry and mission of the church.

Finally, the thesis will argue that recognising the complementarity of Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics and then placing them together in an ongoing, mutually corrective conversation, renders an integrated understanding of the church as both an ecclesia of discourse *and* of character. This understanding will allow the promises implicit in critical theology and ecclesial ethics to be realised. That is to say, first of all, that each will provide a necessary and effective counter balance to the other, rescuing justice from the desert and virtue from the ghetto. Secondly, the redemption of these promises will have major implications for the church: principally the possibility of endorsing authentic political presence and action in the public sphere that embodies both proleptic and anamnestic solidarity with the oppressed.

In memoriam

John Francis  
1938 – 1998

*Dis aliter visum*

## Acknowledgements

This thesis, such as it is, would not have seen the light of day had I not incurred many debts of an intellectual, emotional and material nature. Intellectually I owe a direct and irredeemable debt of gratitude to Professor Duncan Forrester who persevered with me and my often convoluted ideas. He supervised an unruly, and probably over-ambitious candidate, with patience and diligence, academic rigour and pastoral sensitivity the full extent of which I am, only now, beginning to appreciate. Equally important are those whom I am honoured to count as both teachers and colleagues in a theological quest to which I hope I have been able to make some small contribution. Professor Charles Davis and his wife Dr Florence Davis whose hospitality and generosity of mind and spirit were lessons in themselves. Professor J.P. Mackey who taught me, as an undergraduate, that theology isn't theology without an eternal question mark. Dr Kevin Vanhoozer who taught me the didactic significance of conversation.

Equal thanks must be extended to the broader academic community at the University of Edinburgh, now or in the past. Staff and students, scholars of many disciplines, and of many faiths, whose companionship, conversations, encouragement and criticism have played a significant but unsung role in my intellectual and emotional development over the years: Dr Michael Northcott, Dr Jolyon Mitchell, Dr Gillian McKinnon, Dr Stewart Gillan, Dr Jeremy Crang, Dr Fiona Douglas, Marcus Butler, Heather Widdows, Alan J. Riley, Dirk Grützmacher, Tharcisse Gatwa, John McMahon, Nancy Ault, Rachel Benefield and Esther Mombo all deserve special mention.

The material assistance that I have received over the last four years cannot go unmentioned. Thanks are due to the University of Edinburgh, Faculty of Divinity who, in their infinite wisdom, awarded me a University Postgraduate Studentship. In New College, as always, the library staff, Norma Henderson, Paul Coombs and Eileen Dickson merit profound gratitude for their unstinting service over the years. So too does Nick Timmins the computing officer, who provides New College with computing equipment and service that is second to none.

I must, however, acknowledge an intellectual, emotional and material debt that precedes these others and is, in fact, as old as I am. It is for this reason that I dedicate this work, in memory of my father, to my family who provided, from my earliest years, a community of discourse and character that has persisted in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health and, recently, in both joy and sorrow. Finally, my thanks go to my wife Loraine, whose love, patience and sense of humour have sustained my efforts particularly over this last, difficult, year. Where this thesis succeeds, those named above may accept and enjoy their portion of the credit. Where it fails, the fault is all mine.

*Charles Davis’s Critical Theology and Stanley Hauerwas’s Ecclesial Ethics:  
Discourse and Character and The Church’s Political Action.*

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*Bibliography*



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Jürgen Habermas

JA *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*. Ciaran Cronin (trans.)  
Cambridge 1993

KHI *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Jeremy J Shapiro (ed.) (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) London 1978

MC *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Lenhardt & Nicholson (trans.)  
Cambridge 1990

PT *Postmetaphysical Thinking; Philosophical Essays*. William Mark Hohengarten (trans.)  
Cambridge 1992

PDM *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Frederick Lawrence (trans.)  
Cambridge 1997

TCA1 *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 1: Reason and The Rationalisation Of Society*.  
Thomas McCarthy (trans.) Cambridge 1984

TCA2 *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of  
Functionalist Reason*. Thomas McCarthy (trans.) Cambridge 1987

Alasdair MacIntyre

AV *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) London 1985

FPFE *First Principles and Final Ends and Contemporary Philosophical Issues*. Milwaukee 1990

TV *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. London  
1990

WJWR *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London 1988

Charles Davis

RMS *Religion and The Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology*. Cambridge 1994

TPS *Theology and Political Society*. Cambridge 1980

TPCT *The promise of Critical Theology: Essays in Honour of Charles Davis*. Marc P. Lalonde (ed.) Montreal 1995

WLWD *What is Living, What is Dead in Christianity Today? Breaking the Liberal – Conservative Deadlock*.  
San Francisco 1986

Stanley Hauerwas

AC *After Christendom: How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas*. Nashville 1991.

AN *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society*. Minneapolis 1985.

CC *A Community of Character: Towards a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*. Notre Dame 1981.

CCL *Character and The Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics*. San Antonio 1985.

CET *Christian Existence Today. Essays on Church, World and Living in Between*. Durham 1988.

DFTF *Dispatches from The Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular*. Durham 1994.

FTR *Faith in The Republic: A Francis Lewis Law Center Conversation*. Washington and Lee Law Review 45 1988 pp 467 – 534.

NS *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering*. Grand Rapids 1990.

PK *The Peaceable Kingdom: A primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame 1983.

PTS *Preaching to Strangers: Evangelism in Today's World*. (William Willimon) Louisville 1992.

RA *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*. (William Willimon) Nashville 1989.

SP *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped and the Church*. Notre Dame 1986.

TT     *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics.* Notre Dame 1977.

US     *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America.* Nashville 1993.

VV     *Vision and Virtue: Essays In Christian Ethical Reflection.* Notre Dame 1974.

Revisions     *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy.* Alasdair MacIntyre (co-editor) Notre Dame 1983.

Epilogue     *Epilogue; A Pacifist Response to the Bishops. In Paul Ramsey Speak up for Just War or Pacifism: A Critique of the United Methodist Bishops Pastoral Letter "In Defense of Creation."* University Park 1988 pp 149 – 182

John Milbank

TST     *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason.* Oxford 1990.

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## Section 1

### General Introduction

## **Introduction**

### **1. Preliminary Comments**

This thesis seeks to explore the possibilities for the church's political action and presence in the public sphere. The public sphere is the social and cultural background against which the church's claims are made to legitimate action and presence. Our exploration will focus on the responses to this background offered by Charles Davis's so called critical theology, and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. In this introduction it is my intention to justify this exploration. To this end I shall, first of all, elaborate on the background to the thesis. Secondly, I shall state the aims and objectives of the thesis. Thirdly, I shall outline the argument contained in the following chapters.

### **2. Background**

The reason for a theological exploration of this kind arises because in today's world we find that the church, and consequently theology, is increasingly marginalised. The business of religion is increasingly condemned to the private sphere, dealing largely with matters of personal intimacy and remaining neutral in public matters. In such a secularised society that which remains of the substantive business of religion lies, more or less it seems, in the realm of consumer preference.

Therefore, with the possible exception of Islamic states, "... religious impulses are satisfied ... within the sphere of personal [i.e. private] life that is permitted in liberal societies."<sup>1</sup> Thus, to be charitable, the church and theologians are excluded from, or at best remain peripheral to, the discourses of modern culture and society not because of a deliberate policy, but inevitably. Put simply: the subject matter of theology is deemed to be religion and religion is a matter for the private sphere. The church as a religious institution, then, has at best a limited right or ability to comment on matters of public policy or ethics. At best, if the church seeks to offer guidance on such matters then it has to show that living in light of that guidance is productive in terms that will not interfere with the operation of secular society.<sup>2</sup>

Because religious pursuits are, for the most part, limited to the private level they are believed to deal largely with matters of personal intimacy as it takes place in the family and among a limited horizon of friends. Although social issues, these

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<sup>1</sup> Fukuyama *The End of History and the Last Man*. 1992. Avon Books, New York. p 14.

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre says something similar in *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy From the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*. (1968) 1991, Routledge. London. p 144. "If religion is to propound a set of rules or a set of goals successfully, it must do so by showing that to live in the light of such rules and goals will be the productive of what men can independently judge to be good. ... new values have to commend themselves by reason of the role that they can have in human life." Even at this early stage MacIntyre was concerned with a sustained critique of western societies in the face of the division and fragmentation of everyday life in relation to the great moral scheme of the Enlightenment. In his description of Christian moral reflection he notes that the Christian view is that all political orders are sinful and stand in need of gospel critique. Christianity's complicity in the process of the Enlightenment has led to an unstable relationship between church and state, between sacred and secular and rendered the possibility of such critique doubtful. Thus MacIntyre advocates an anti-clerical secularism and an atheism that rejects false gods. For MacIntyre, Marxist atheism has religious roots and can thus provide a potentially protective doctrine for Christianity. (See Peter McMyllor *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity*. 1994. Routledge. London. p 5). MacIntyre, as we shall note in the thesis, however, has made it clear latterly that he committed to Augustinian Christianity with philosophical loyalty to Thomism institutionalised in the Roman Catholic Church (see WJWR and TRV).

categories lie at the upper limit of the private realm. More large-scale problems, the structural concerns in society, are not seen as the preserve of the religious. Charles Taylor, in addressing this problem, suggests that it arises from the loss of substantive modes of reason. He notes that, as moderns, there is a strong sense that we:

“... demand universal justice and beneficence, are particularly sensitive to the claim of equality, feel the demands to freedom and self-rule as axiomatically justified, and put a very high priority on the avoidance of death and suffering.”<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, he suggests that the original theistic horizon that was the source and context of these ideas of the good, of our norms and values has been shattered. As a result, the contemporary effort to reflect on ethics, including Christian ethics, has lost its substantive content, its coherence and, therefore, its ability to contribute effectively to universal ideas of the good. Consequently, we suffer under the dominance of an Enlightenment naturalistic horizon and anthropology that results in an inability to explain adequately why we bother with these universal themes at all. Against this background, contemporary secular discourse on ethics comprises two main, opposing strains. That is to say, communicative or discourse ethics represented in this thesis by Jürgen Habermas and virtue or communitarian ethics represented by Alasdair MacIntyre.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of The Modern Identity*. 1989 CUP. Cambridge p 495.

On the one hand, broadly speaking, Habermas's communicative or discourse ethics represents a continuation of the Enlightenment project while, on the other hand, MacIntyre's communitarian or virtue ethics represent a challenge to it. Seyla Benhabib points out that, as such, "... if communicative or discourse ethics is to be at all credible, it must be able to meet the kind of challenges posed by MacIntyre and Hauerwas."<sup>4</sup> Of course, the corollary is true, Communitarian ethics must be able to answer the challenges of "... a dialogically reformulated universalist ethical theory."<sup>5</sup> It is outwith the scope of this thesis to engage Habermas and MacIntyre in the sort of head to head confrontation that this type of test would require. This is because the primary concern of the thesis is a theological one. More precisely, and in a particular sense, it is an ecclesiological one. It is, therefore, more relevant to our needs to read these influential thinkers through the eyes of two theologians who take seriously their concerns and apply Habermas's and MacIntyre's ideas to theological questions.

There are, in fact, few occasions where Alasdair MacIntyre and Jürgen Habermas confront each other's theories directly. In MacIntyre there are one or two passing remarks: in *After Virtue* he refers to "... the heirs of the Frankfurt

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<sup>4</sup> See Benhabib *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. 1992 Polity Press Cambridge p 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



School”<sup>6</sup> who, whilst attempting, to counter the Weberian narrative of the encroachment of instrumental reason, unwittingly reinforce it. In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* we find a direct reference to Habermas in the following passage:

“The claim that I am making is a modest, albeit metaphysical one, not to be confused, for example, with Habermas’s neo-Kantian thesis that allegiance to one specific set of norms is a necessary condition for communicative acts.”<sup>7</sup>

In *Justification and Application*,<sup>8</sup> which contains Habermas’s general response to neo-Aristotelian philosophies, he dedicates a section to MacIntyre’s position as it is articulated in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* This exposition is clear and precise. Habermas sees MacIntyre as developing a “... version of strong contextualism”<sup>9</sup> through which he attempts to combine two incompatible theses:

“Against the alleged abstract universalism of the Enlightenment, MacIntyre defends (a) the thesis that there is no such thing as a context-transcending rationality, only different forms of rationality rooted in traditions. And against a performatively self-contradictory relativism, he upholds (b) the thesis that productive communication between self-centred traditions is no less feasible than learning from alien traditions. ... In what follows I will examine whether

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<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre AV p 31.

<sup>7</sup> MacIntyre TRV p 46.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas JA p 96 – 105.

<sup>9</sup> Habermas JA p 96.

the contextualist thesis can be reconciled with the anti relativist one.”<sup>10</sup>

Habermas, in the course of this discussion, argues that MacIntyre, in attempting to reconcile these two incompatible theses, becomes embroiled in several contradictions. He locates the origin of these contradictions in MacIntyre’s desire to combine a hermeneutic view of the translation and interpretation of alien traditions with a strong form of contextualism that ties the identity of the translator to the substantive judgements of a particular tradition. In response to MacIntyre’s strong contextualism Habermas draws upon insights from Gadamer, to formulate a weaker version of context dependency:

“The fusion of interpretive horizons at which, on Gadamer’s account, every communicative process aims should not be understood in terms of the false alternative between assimilation ‘to us’ and a conversion ‘to them’. It is more properly described as a convergence between ‘our’ perspective and ‘theirs’ guided by learning processes, regardless of whether ‘they’ or ‘we’ or both sides must reform the practices of justification thus far accepted as valid. Concepts such as truth, rationality, and justification play the *same* role in *every* language community, even if they are interpreted differently and applied in accordance with different criteria.”<sup>11</sup>

Here Habermas contrasts a weak formal conception of rationality, with the strong substantive account developed by MacIntyre. In short, we are looking at an argument which places in opposition discourse derived from principles of practical

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas JA p 96.

<sup>11</sup> Habermas JA p 105.

reason and discourse which is tradition dependent: broadly speaking, an argument between reason and tradition.

It is in this climate that the church continues to claim a valid voice and presence in the public sphere of debate on morality and matters of public polity. For Habermas, though, this is a dubious claim.<sup>12</sup> The theological tradition, to which the church is heir, relies on a strong form of contextualism and is, therefore, as suspect as MacIntyre's position. Hence the secular debate between public reason and tradition is replayed in the church. A claim, such as the church makes, to a place in the public sphere is problematic since the public sphere is dominated by distorted principles of instrumental reason. In this context, "neither science nor the art can inherit the mantle of religion: only a morality, set communicatively afloat and developed into discursive ethics inherits the authority of the sacred."<sup>13</sup> Religion thus disinherited is rightly consigned to the private sphere and emancipatory activity is focused on developing communicative rationality and action. Meanwhile, MacIntyre actively pursues a contextualised form of ethical discourse which clearly endorses the Christian ethical tradition that culminates in Aquinas which, he claims, is clearly more coherent and of more value in the public sphere. MacIntyre's strong contextualism appeals to many contemporary theologians precisely because it apparently vindicates the Christian notion of a

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Habermas has said that religion has no place in the public sphere. We shall deal with this matter in more depth in Chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas TCA 2 p 92.

particular ecclesial community, in the face of the totalising narrative of the Enlightenment.

Returning to the ecclesiological dimension of this thesis, then, we should define the precise parameters of our own ecclesiological concerns. The church claims to be a community with its roots in divine revelation and whose central principle is that no one should live for themselves alone but also for their neighbour and the greater glory of God. This presents us with a two-fold problem. On the one hand, its discourses on ethics and theology are internal and, to an extent, both exclusive and excluding. On the other hand, it is essential that this community engage in mission as one of its responses to God's revelation. This commitment to mission requires that the members of such a community engage with the culture in which they find themselves. To this extent, at least, theology is public and necessarily addresses social and political relationships. Consequently it is concerned with the realm of social ethics. The voice of this community, however, works in two directions emanating from and shaping the community from whence it comes. In other words, it is the critical voice of discipline and authority within, but it is also the prophetic voice that engages critically with the outside world and articulates its political action.

Since articulations of the church's political action, and the political action itself, have created different genres such as apologetics, homiletics and so on, two questions arise. First of all, we have to ask whether the church can, in fact, have a viable voice in contemporary public discourse on ethics. If the answer to that question is 'yes' then we are led to a second question: that is to say, how can the church hope to comment or act in the public sphere? The answer to the second question seems to come in two forms. On the one hand, the church is left in the position of capitulation with modernity, in which case it loses its distinctive voice and risks disappearing in the cultural desert of the public sphere where, as we shall see, it is not likely to flourish. On the other hand, the church might stand out against the prevailing ethos in which case it risks disappearing into a counter-cultural ghetto, where it may be equally unlikely to flourish. In either case, political action and religious affiliation run the risk of being separated and rendered ineffectual. Working on the assumption that we wish to affirm the church's viability in the public sphere, this thesis will focus on the theologies of Charles Davis and Stanley Hauerwas. Both Davis and Hauerwas articulate an understanding of authentic or effectual political action in the public sphere and, broadly speaking, represent critical, theological re-formulations of Habermas's and MacIntyre's responses to the concerns of modernity.

Davis and Hauerwas construct their responses in the shape of programmatic theologies, critical theology and ecclesial ethics respectively. For

Davis's critical theology, authentic politics is "... a process of communication among fully individual subjects in freedom."<sup>14</sup> For Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics, authentic politics demands that the church should not have a social ethic, rather its task is to be a social ethic.<sup>15</sup> Thus we have two theological responses to the contemporary social and cultural context which broadly represent an appeal to practical reason either understood as formal and procedural or as an appeal to tradition. In other words, they represent two theological sides of the so-called liberal-communitarian debate that focuses on a choice between reason and liberty or tradition and authority.

At first sight Davis and Hauerwas present positions which are not compatible. However, I place them together for two reasons. First, in order to test the viability of the two, since critical theology represents a community of faith governed by the principles of discourse ethics and ecclesial ethics represents a community of faith governed by communitarian principles, they must be put to the test described by Benhabib above. Secondly, if we understand these two positions to be poles within a tradition of discourse, then they represent a productive partnership for dialogue. In which case, a synthesis of two apparently antithetical positions will, in the first instance, be more representative of the true feelings of Christians. That is to say, true feelings about the world in which we live and our self-understanding as complex, modern politically active individuals whose

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<sup>14</sup> Davis WLWD p 1.

<sup>15</sup> Hauerwas RA p 43, COC p 40, PK p 99, AN p 74, CET p 101.

identity is, in part, defined by the community of faith called the church. In the second place, the import of these two theologies placed together should act as a constructive counterbalance each to the other, and hence facilitate authentic political action in the public sphere.

To place Davis and Hauerwas together in this fashion requires that we go to the heart of their respective theologies and uncover the basic concerns upon which they operate. In the course of this excavation we shall uncover a series of shared concerns: namely the problems of modernity; the relationship of the church to the world; the success or otherwise of political theologies, including liberation theologies; the significance of praxis in Christian life; the relationship of faith to belief; questions of identity, political action and community.<sup>16</sup> We shall do no more than list these shared concerns at this point since they will be picked up and explored in depth in later chapters. However, it should be noted that as such common themes provide the impetus for Davis and Hauerwas's theological endeavours, I shall argue that they prefigure significantly more commonality in their conclusions that has been appreciated hitherto. Curiously, the common ground that they share is, in fact, much more interesting than their differences. Nevertheless, at the outset we are left to choose between the church led into a desert of cultural relativity and the church walled-up in a ghettoised, self-referential, counter-culture.

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<sup>16</sup> We shall expand these shared concerns in Chapter 6.

### 3. Thesis Statement

The overall intention of this thesis, then, is twofold. Firstly, to explore the ramifications of Davis's and Hauerwas's positions. Secondly, it is to endeavour to redeem the promises of authentic political action implicit in critical theology and ecclesial ethics. To this end I intend to show that Davis and Hauerwas, having used the philosophical resources provided by Jürgen Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre respectively, represent complementary rather than oppositional calls to a new vision, integrity and practice of and for theology. The direct consequence of this complementary vision, integrity and practice will be for the ministry and mission of the church and will allow it to fulfil the promises implicit in critical theology and ecclesial ethics. The promises of critical theology and ecclesial ethics relate to the realisation of what each regards as authentic political action in the public sphere, and its implications for the community of faith. The implications for the community of faith lie in the way that the community of faith is understood and reconfigured by Davis and Hauerwas. For Davis, the church should be configured as a community of discourse. For Hauerwas, the church should be understood as a community of character. Discourse and character are both the starting point and the conclusion for Davis and Hauerwas respectively in their explorations of authentic political action through critical theology and ecclesial ethics. Hence, the choice between reason and tradition, replayed in the church, becomes a choice between discourse and character. Moreover, authentic political action, clearly, is



profoundly tied up with questions about community which, in turn, bring to the fore questions of religious and social identity.

Through a detailed exploration of these questions, with respect to Davis and Hauerwas, it will become clear that their respective positions though not apparently compatible can and, in fact, should be recognised as such. In order to substantiate this claim I will argue that Davis's community of discourse and Hauerwas's community of character, while undergoing the comparison according to Benhabib's principle cited above, should be tested against a control model of a standard ecclesiology. This control model will be distilled from an encounter between Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Free Church ecclesiologists.<sup>17</sup> By undertaking this comparison, I will show that while Davis's community of discourse is strong on catholicity and unity it is weak on holiness and apostolicity whereas Hauerwas's community of character is strong on holiness and apostolicity but weak on catholicity and unity. Consequently, in order to comply fully with the criteria of ecclesiality described by these credal marks, Davis and Hauerwas should, again, be seen as complementary and mutually corrective, rather than oppositional.

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<sup>17</sup> Volf, M. *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. 1998. Eerdmans. Michigan/Cambridge.

Finally, I will argue that recognising the complementarity of Davis and Hauerwas and placing them together in an ongoing, mutually corrective conversation, renders a more full understanding of the church as both an ecclesia of discourse *and* of character. This understanding will allow the promises implicit in critical theology and ecclesial ethics to be realised. That is to say that, placing them together in an ongoing conversation will mean, first of all, that each will provide a necessary and effective counter balance to the other, rescuing virtue from the ghetto and bringing justice in from the desert. Secondly, the redemption of these promises will have significant implications for the community of faith and the possibility of endorsing authentic political presence and action, that has both proleptic and anamnestic solidarity with the oppressed, in the public sphere.

#### 4. Thesis Outline

In Chapter 1, therefore, I shall begin by tracing the more substantial elements of the respective responses of Jürgen Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre to the Enlightenment. Broadly speaking, Habermas continues in the German idealist tradition to fashion a narrative of the Enlightenment that replaces dogmatic tradition with the authority of critical reason. Hence, he characterises his own project as a continuation of that discourse that was given its definitive expression in Kant. In contrast, MacIntyre challenges this narrative, claiming that the Enlightenment, far from being an advance, is a fragmentation of the discourse of rational enquiry that culminates in Aquinas. Truth and rationality, if they are

to retain any sense in the modern age, must be drawn from this tradition. Clearly both of these positions raise certain theological issues which will be highlighted at the conclusion of this chapter: that is to say, they raise the issue of the nature and task of theology and its viability in the public sphere. The next four chapters will deal with this issue in depth with reference to the work of Charles Davis and Stanley Hauerwas.

In Chapters 2 and 3 we examine the critical theology of Charles Davis. We shall see that Davis takes seriously the problems of modernity, engaging with them head on. In this engagement Davis finds an ally in Jürgen Habermas and his account of discourse ethics. The methodology and insights of discourse ethics provide, for Davis, an important resource upon which to build what he calls critical theology which confronts the questions thrown up by the contemporary political, social and economic concerns of late modernity more accurately than traditional theology manages to do. These chapters rest, first of all, on exploring Davis's acceptance of Habermas's contention, outlined in Chapter 1, that the discursive redemption of normative claims, involved in discourse ethics, itself follows an irreversible sequence from myth through religion to philosophy and ideology and finds its culmination in critique. The history of religion, therefore, presents an essential component in this sequence from myth to critique, insofar as religion identified and mediated norms and moral value. But the rise of critique renders the mediating efficacy of religion obsolete. The development of

communicative competence however passes the authority, once vested in religion, into another, public, sphere of communication and discourse wherein norms and values are worked out. All that is left of religion is a universal moral code that may or may not be of existential comfort at a private level.

Nevertheless, Davis's exploration of the Habermasian position is the starting point for his search for a new religious identity. He describes this identity as a "... post-conventional, universalistic religious identity, both personal and social, not tied to the fixed contents and norms of any one tradition nor to any permanent collective body, [which] alone corresponds to the present level of human social development."<sup>18</sup> In the world of 'posts', Davis's position might most conveniently be described as one of post-orthodoxy and an exegesis of his principal claim, that theology today ought to be concerned with the relationship between faith and social practice. "Christian Faith is a transformative principle, not a body of objective knowledge."<sup>19</sup> For Davis, as a transformative principle, faith relates directly to praxis. Christian praxis, as he construes it, is a response to the reality of a transcendent gift or revelation and finally: "The message of revelation is a praxis, *an ethical life*, a way of being and acting. It may be partially articulated in propositions. It may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a *practical way of life*."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Davis RMS p 152.

<sup>19</sup> Davis WLWD p 78.

<sup>20</sup> Davis RMS p 95 my emphasis.

This way of being, or praxis, is to be understood as a negation of those types of theology which themselves negate the transformative principle of faith, and for Davis this means any theology which does not meet the criteria of what he calls critical theology. The task of theology, as proposed in Davis's critical theology, must now be understood as the re-creation of society in light of a transformative faith. The task of the critical theologian is, therefore, to equip Christians to contribute to this re-creation. This contribution is not a pastime nor accidental by-product of faith, but an imperative intrinsic to the practical way of life. As we shall see, this imperative also calls for the politicising of the church. "Critical theology acknowledges that the Christian tradition, like other traditions, is not exclusively a source of truth and value, but a vehicle of untruth and false values and thus must be subjected to a critique of ideology and critically appropriated, not simply made one's own in an assimilative process of interpretation."<sup>21</sup> This self-aware assimilation of tradition is a methodology that, Davis argues, is essential for any theology which is likely to redress the excesses of modernity at the same time as making critical statements in the public sphere. In fact it typifies critical theology. Consequently Davis is clearly pointing towards a much more radical agenda than either liberation or political theology as he understands them.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Davis TPS p 25.

<sup>22</sup> Davis goes to considerable length in TPS to analyse both political and liberation theologies. His subjects include Johan Baptist Metz, Dorothy Sölle and Jan Luis Segundo. In RMS he returns to

To understand Davis's insight into the public significance of the transformative efficacy of critical theology, we must understand that he sees society as the product of free human agency governed by rationality.<sup>23</sup> The ongoing construction of this society is a political endeavour. Davis does not, however, claim any special place for religion "... which should not stand apart from our secular lives as a distinct realm of thought or action. There is no proper or specific religious language precisely because religion is not a specifically distinct realm of meaning or culture."<sup>24</sup> Therefore, since the religious identity that Davis has developed is broadly the same as the social, religious and political action should not be differentiated. (Further to this religion can reasonably be expected to keep conversations going by refusing to absolutise any finite order.<sup>25</sup>) Paradoxically, according to Davis the practices, narratives, symbols and values of a religious tradition can only be secure when engaged in critical discourse with other traditions in the public sphere, otherwise a torpid conservatism will ensue. Religion formulated as sharing a single history and not tied to the fixed contents of one tradition and then articulated in critical theology, according to Davis, presents us with a means of salvaging conversations precisely because it refuses to draw on differentiated spheres of political, theological and religious activity. But what sort of community would a tradition informed by critical theology give us? Put simply,

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this theme and includes an attack on John Milbank as a representative of a latter day, politically significant theology.

<sup>23</sup> Davis p 124 and Chapter 1 of RMS.

<sup>24</sup> Davis RMS p 118.

<sup>25</sup> Davis RMS p 126.

a community of discourse. What gives substance to this community's narrative is the pursuit of justice, that is a constant striving to understand the other in discourse.<sup>26</sup>

Leaving Davis's critical theology aside for the moment, in Chapters 4 and 5 I shall consider the ecclesial ethics of Stanley Hauerwas. It is Hauerwas's avowed intention to stand against 'liberal' theology and faith which seeks to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age. It is his often stated, virtually axiomatic claim that the church should not have a social ethic, rather its task is to be a social ethic.<sup>27</sup> To this end, Hauerwas responds to the contemporary situation with a constructive programme of ecclesial or church ethics offering the church as precisely that community which offers the necessary context for coherent ethical discourse and political action. However, rather than Davis's community of discourse Hauerwas conceives of the church as a counter-cultural enclave.<sup>28</sup> By way of a word of caution, however, it would be disingenuous simply to consign Hauerwas to the file marked 'sectarian' and abandon him there. Equally, we should be wary of regarding him as simply providing a facile response to MacIntyre's gloomy prognosis at the end of *After Virtue*: "What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral

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<sup>26</sup> Hodgson *God in History: Shapes of Freedom*. 1989. Abingdon, Nashville. p 231.

<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas RA p 43, COC p 40, PK p 99, AN p 74, CET p 101.

<sup>28</sup> This is generally the thrust of *Resident Aliens: Life in The Christian Colony*. 1989 Abingdon Nashville (co-authored with William Willimon). In this book Hauerwas argues that the church has a mission of its own. Its task is to be the church or a community of faith with a vision and story which is radically different and which, in turn, tends to a different way of life.

life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are upon us.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, Hauerwas provides sagacious and insightful commentary of his own upon the contemporary theological and philosophical climate, and, as we shall see in this chapter, his ecclesial ethics call for reinforcing the integrity of the church in its mission and ministry. This call resonates with Davis, and it will become clear that though they share some intuitions concerning modernity, they reach apparently quite different conclusions.

The focus of these chapters will be rest on Hauerwas’s proposed solution to the problems of modernity that challenge the church. For Hauerwas this solution lies in redefining what qualifies as authentic political activity. On the one hand, inauthentic political activity comes for the Christian church when it attempts to influence the modern, liberal polity because this leads to adapting to that polity and language. This diminishes one’s identity as Christians because the more adaptation occurs, the less ability there will be to see, think and understand as Christians. On the other hand, Hauerwas equates authentic political action with the practices learned by Christians within the context of the Christian community.<sup>30</sup> This, of course, suggests that there is no equivalence in status or value in the same practices found in other traditions or communities.

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<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre AV p 253.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Hauerwas IGC p 6-8.



These chapters will elaborate on Hauerwas's point of departure from other so-called communitarians, and even from MacIntyre. That is to say that he is most interested in advocating a particular kind of community (the church) typified by particular characteristics than arguing for the priority of community generally.<sup>31</sup> In his later work, Hauerwas augments his understanding of character with an exploration of narrative. For Hauerwas, all significant moral claims are historically derived and require narrative display.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore crucial to understand the right story. For Hauerwas this means the most truthful story, because a truthful community engenders a truthful people. Thus, for Hauerwas, the Christian story of Jesus Christ with its prologue in Israel and its sequel in the historic church is the truthful story and the church is the truthful people and bearer of narrative.

This understanding of the church allows Hauerwas to locate Christian ethics not in common experience but in difference: not in action but in character and historical community. That is to say that politics for Hauerwas has less to do with rules, principles, situations or consequences than it has to do with the formation of characterful people. The church "...is where stories of Israel and Jesus are told, enacted and heard, and it is our conviction that as Christian people there is nothing more important we can do." Further to this "the church is finally known by the character of the people who constitute it."<sup>33</sup> Thus, for Hauerwas,

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<sup>31</sup> See Rasmussen *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas*. 1994 Lund University Press, Lund. pp 271 – 274.

<sup>32</sup> Hauerwas COC p 99.

<sup>33</sup> Hauerwas PK p 109.

the notion of 'character' carries with it ethical and political connotations to the extent that Christian character relates to the normative Christian story embodied and played out in the normative Christian community, that is the church.<sup>34</sup> Thus for Hauerwas the church is best understood as a community of character.

Having thus established the type of communities which critical theology and ecclesial ethics emanate from and, in turn shape, we return in Chapter 6 to the original dilemma: reason or tradition? Given Davis and Hauerwas's understanding of the church, we must ask if the church is best understood according to one or the other. That is to say, can the church be seen as a community of discourse? If so, does Davis's community of discourse coincide with any recognisable ecclesiology? Similarly, can the church be seen as a community of character? To attempt to answer these questions, this chapter will concentrate on testing Davis and Hauerwas's claims against a control model of the church. To this end we shall utilise a definition of the church presented by Miroslav Volf. This definition is particularly useful since it is distilled from an encounter between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Reformed ecclesiology. Volf takes as his starting point the biblical passage "... where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>35</sup> From this, Volf determines two characteristic conditions of the church, that is to say assembly and confession.<sup>36</sup> He says "[t]he church is first of all

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<sup>34</sup> This understanding of character will be explored fully in Chapters 4 & 5.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 18<sup>20</sup>; Volf p 136.

<sup>36</sup> Volf pp 137ff & 145ff.

an assembly ... but an assembly is not yet the church. An indispensable condition of ecclesiality is that the people *assemble in the name of Christ*.<sup>37</sup> This model will allow us to analyse Davis's community of discourse and Hauerwas's community of character. In so doing we shall gain a clearer insight into the possibility of each of these communities fulfilling the criteria of ecclesiality. We shall see that each community represents a fulfilment of some of the criteria, reflecting to a greater or lesser extent the church understood as a confessing assembly carrying the marks of catholicity, holiness and apostolicity. This test will allow us to assess the extent to which either Davis's and Hauerwas's positions present an accurate rendering of the church. Indeed, much of the terminology will already be familiar from our reading of Davis and Hauerwas.

Davis's understanding of communication and plurality finds resonances in the control model as will Hauerwas's focus on the story of Christ as the normative constituent for the church. Placing them together provides a more complete understanding of the church as both a community of discourse and of character. As such Davis's and Hauerwas's communities both represent productive policies of creative disaffiliation: Davis from the totalising juridical-hierarchical church with the attendant threat of sectarianism, and Hauerwas from the corrupting influences of modern liberal polity to a position of radical witness. I shall therefore conclude in this chapter that the answer to our original dilemma, concerning the choice

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<sup>37</sup> Volf Ibid. His emphasis.

between reason and tradition, should lie in asking of Davis and Hauerwas 'Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?' Expressed thus, it became clear that for the church the answer to the dilemma is both. That is to say, the resolution is not better understood as a having to choose between Davis and Hauerwas, as representatives of reason or tradition, rather it is better understood through Davis *and* Hauerwas together. Consequently, the dilemma is resolved into an issue of discovering the conditions necessary for maintaining these two apparently contradictory positions in a constructive partnership rather than a destructive opposition. Thus we have a strong case for suggesting that we should start to look at Davis and Hauerwas as not, necessarily, contradictory or irreconcilable. A community as described by our control model and further refined by the credal marks of the church has, as it were, an internal discourse on ethics and theology which is 'in-house' and, to an extent, exclusive and excluding dealing with holiness and apostolicity. Hauerwas equips us well to this end. On the other hand its apostolic integrity requires that this community engage in mission as one of its responses to its self-understanding. This commitment to mission requires that the members of such a community engage the culture in which they find themselves. Such mission is public and necessarily addresses social and political relationships dealing, as it were, with catholicity and unity. Davis provides the method and the means for such an engagement. Meanwhile, the import of their respective theologies on the church will act as a constructive counterbalance to each other. Hence, I would contend, Davis and Hauerwas are better understood as complementary conversation

partners whose positions, rather than describing a deadlock, describe the boundaries of an ongoing ecclesiological conversation.

In the concluding Chapter 7 I shall consider the implications for authentic political action of Davis's post-orthodox critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics when understood as complementary rather than oppositional in light of our findings in Chapter 6. I will explore the conditions necessary for maintaining these two positions in a constructive partnership rather than a destructive opposition. To this end, and in conclusion, we shall endeavour to explore the necessary conditions for such a constructive conversational participation, and examine vision and integrity in practice. To do this we shall, first of all, explore the relationship between the transformative principle in critical theology and the performative aspect of ecclesial ethics in Davis and Hauerwas. This will lead us into a discussion of the consequences of reform and truthfulness. Secondly, we shall return to the metaphor of pilgrimage common to both Hauerwas and Davis, and inquire, as to what conditions must prevail to allow Davis and Hauerwas to continue as fellow travellers. This exploration will be carried out through a discussion of the particular practical problem of suffering and death faced by the church daily in its pastoral office. Finally, I will shall conclude by showing that, through holding Davis and Hauerwas together in constructive intercourse, we can endorse the possibility of the church's authentic political action in the public sphere. Hence, this final chapter will issue concluding statements on the conditions necessary for

an ongoing theological conversation between critical theology and ecclesial ethics, insofar as they provide complementary calls to vision and integrity in the praxis of the church. I will conclude the argument of the thesis by suggesting that we can endorse the idea that critical theology and ecclesial ethics actually provide an effective and desirable check and balance each for the other. Understanding the church in light of this dynamic means that we can endorse the possibility of the church's political action and presence in the public sphere. Hence, the church's place is not in the cultural desert or in the ecclesial ghetto, but on the margins. Political action and presence thus located will be based in the proleptic and anamnestic solidarity that is indispensable to the operation of critical theology and ecclesial ethics in the face of humanity's negative contingencies. Proleptic and anamnestic solidarity, then, is the necessary condition for critical theology and ecclesial ethics to continue as fellow travellers.

## **Chapter 1. Two Critiques of Modernity**

### **1.1. Introduction**

As we suggested in the introduction, to understand the significance of Charles Davis's critical theology and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics it is important to appreciate some of their philosophical antecedents. In this chapter, therefore, we shall trace the respective responses of Jürgen Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre to the Enlightenment. Broadly speaking, Habermas continues in the German idealist tradition to fashion a narrative of the Enlightenment that replaces a dogmatic understanding of tradition with the authority of critical reason. Hence, he characterises his own project as a continuation of that discourse which was given its definitive expression in Kant. MacIntyre, in contrast, challenges this narrative, claiming that the Enlightenment, far from being an advance, is a fragmentation of that discourse of rational enquiry that culminates in Aquinas. Truth and rationality, if they are to retain any sense in the modern age, must be drawn from this tradition. Our exposition of these positions will, in turn, raise a number of theological questions that we shall introduce at the end of the chapter.

This will provide a point of departure for our study of Charles Davis's critical theology and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the chapter will follow a course from a general description of modernity as the age of critical reason to the theological matters arising from Habermas and MacIntyre's philosophical presentation. This will take us, first of all, from Habermas and the 'unfinished project' of the Enlightenment to MacIntyre's alternative critique of modernity, culminating in a description of the precise parameters of the challenges each raises for the other in terms of a dichotomy between reason and tradition. In this light we shall, finally, pick up the significant theological matters arising from Habermas and MacIntyre's critiques, and present them as the point of departure for Davis and Hauerwas's reading of them.

### *1.1.2 The Age of Critical Reason: Its Determining Principles*

Before moving on to the substantive business of dealing with Habermas's and MacIntyre's critiques of modernity we shall outline briefly the determining principles of modernity in terms of these critiques. The term Enlightenment is used here to define that project or discourse which is constitutive of modern societies. To quote Kant:

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this chapter has been shaped bearing in mind the way in which Davis and Hauerwas respectively, have read Habermas and MacIntyre. Thus it emphasises the themes that each sees to be generally important in their philosophical antecedent. Later in this chapter and in chapters 2 & 4 we shall consider the matters of particular theological interest.



use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of the Enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding."<sup>2</sup>

This description of the Enlightenment is further refined as the discourse that would rid humanity from the yoke of traditional, unreflective, cosmological world-views, and establish the unity of rational enquiry on the basis of critical reason. Liberation for humanity from the yoke of authority, in these terms, is achieved through replacing the teleological ordering of the cosmos with a synthesis arrived at through the faculty of subjective reason.

Prior to the dawn of the Enlightenment, rationality and truth were defined in substantive terms.<sup>3</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre notes that pre-Enlightenment substantive conceptions of rationality were tied to teleological ordering of the cosmos: which is to say there is a realist understanding of beings and their place in the universe, whereby each being is understood in terms of its place within this hierarchy. Hence, for Plato and Aristotle, for example, rational enquiry is hierarchically ordered, reflecting the order of the universe, and each particular science can, therefore, only be fully understood and fully understand when located in this

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<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in Hans Reiss (ed.) H.B. Nisbet (trans.), *Kant's Political Writings*. 1970. CUP, Cambridge. pp 54 – 60.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Taylor provides a definition of a substantive conception of reason thus: "... we judge the rationality of agents or their thoughts and feelings in substantive terms. This means that the criteria for rationality is the one that gets it right. Plato has a conception of this kind. You could not be fully rational, in his book, and believe for instance that Democritus was right about the natural world or that the best life was one where you fulfilled the most sensual desires." Charles Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. pp 85 – 86.

order. MacIntyre characterises Aristotle's hierarchical conception of the universe as follows:

"His is a universe structured in a hierarchical way - that is why the hierarchical structure of the sciences is appropriate for giving a realist account of such a universe - and each level of the hierarchy provides the matter in and through which the forms of the next higher level actualise and perfect themselves."<sup>4</sup>

It was precisely this understanding of the universe that was challenged by the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers argued that the hierarchical ordering posited by traditional world-views could not be rationally sustained. Historical events alone seemed to conspire against these notions. For example, the idea that humanity has a fixed nature became increasingly difficult to maintain with the discovery of new civilisations, which in turn gave rise to the questioning of traditional patterns of social domination.<sup>5</sup> In place of a given pattern, mediated through a tradition of reflection, according to which one was to judge one's existence, the Enlightenment thinkers suggested that each person must be responsible for following laws of reason. Thus subjectivity became one of the determining principles of modernity. With each individual responsible for ordering their own existence, the Enlightenment emphasis on the related notion of rational autonomy also developed.

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<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre WJWR p 101.

<sup>5</sup> For instance Peter Singer says "Once we admit that Darwin was right when he argued that human ethics evolved from the social instincts that were inherited from our non-human ancestors, we can put aside the hypothesis of a divine origin for ethics." *Ethics* 1994 Oxford University Press. Oxford p 6. This quote serves to suggest that the historical event of Darwin's voyages and discoveries poses a problem for an older form of ethical thinking. This is in keeping with the notion that the very vulgar fact of our historical contingency, made clear through the Enlightenment, raises problems for more traditional theological or cosmological understanding.

The challenge to the teleological world-view of the pre-Enlightenment simultaneously reflected, and gave impetus to, a new and developing conceptualisation of nature. The newly emerging natural sciences brought with them a new way of understanding nature and the universe that challenged Aristotelian physics. Aristotle had characterised motion as the actualisation of a potential for being, according to the hierarchical ordering of the universe in which each being moves in order to realise its *telos*.<sup>6</sup> The new sciences, in contrast to the Aristotelian model, provided the impetus for a theory of the universe in which the hierarchical order of all beings is replaced by an order described by general mechanical laws of causation. This in turn gives rise to the second determining principle of modernity: namely the rise of 'scientific' knowledge and of instrumental reason. However, this principle, though formulated to challenge teleological world-views, conflicts with the principle of greater rational autonomy, since the universe is understood to operate under determinate laws. Hence, we can characterise the Enlightenment in terms of two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand there is the move toward greater autonomy, on the other there is the advance of ever more general causal laws.

Finally, in Kant we see the culmination of this process of evolution away from pre-Enlightenment thinking to typically Enlightenment thought. Moreover, we see the two determining principles of the Enlightenment synthesised in an attempt to avoid the foregoing contradiction. According to Kant it is through the faculty of subjectivity that the universe is ordered according to determinate laws. This leads Kant to posit the existence of two worlds, the sensible world in which

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<sup>6</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1973 Introduction and notes by Akkrill, J.L., Faber, London.

manifold appearance is placed under ever more general causal laws, and the intelligible world in which the autonomous subject acts outside this determined world of nature, according to principles of freedom. As a result of this dynamic, modern Western society and culture can be understood as having become differentiated into three main categories, culture, politics and economics. These are governed by interests that are embodied in the natural sciences, in the market economy and in the nation state respectively.<sup>7</sup>

## 1.2. Jürgen Habermas and the Unfinished Project of the Enlightenment

Having outlined modernity as the age of critical reason typified by the work of Kant, we come now to an examination of the work of Jürgen Habermas and his response to the Enlightenment discourse. We shall do this by, first of all, highlighting some of the main concerns and vocabulary that he uses. Following on from here we shall analyse Habermas's exposition of what he calls the unfinished project of modernity.

### 1.2.1. A Brief Exposition of Habermas's scheme and vocabulary.

Before going on to explore Habermas's argument in detail, however, it would be advantageous to illuminate some of the terminology and vocabulary that he uses because of the immense complexity of his project. In order to understand the significance of Habermas's position for critical theory, it is necessary to

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<sup>7</sup> See Peukert "The Philosophical Critique of Modernity" in *Concilium* 1992 vol. 6 pp17 - 26. See also Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project." In Hal Foster (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. 1990 Pluto Press. London pp 3 - 15 and M Passerin D'Entreves and S Benhabib (eds.) *Habermas and The Unfinished Project of Modernity*. CUP, Cambridge 1996 pp38 - 55.

appreciate at least three aspects of Habermas's work. First of all, the nature of his endeavour to reconstruct the project of modernity; second his crucial distinction between lifeworld and system; and third, his understanding of the relationship of the logic and dynamic of rationalisation.

Habermas's seminal work *Theory of Communicative Action*<sup>8</sup> attempts to reconstruct the project of modernity. That is to say that he attempts to reconstruct the secular ideal of universal reason harnessed to emancipation and the good life, first articulated via Kant in late nineteenth century Europe. This reconstruction takes account of Habermas's insight that universal reason requires grounding, not in the subject/object relationships of the philosophy of consciousness but in the subject/subject relationships of communicative action. To be precise, his core insight is that people's use of language to communicate implies a common endeavour to attain consensus in a context in which all participants are free to contribute and have equal opportunities to do so. He writes "[r]eaching understanding is the inherent *telos* of human speech."<sup>9</sup> Such language use presupposes a commitment to an ideal speech situation in which discourse can realise its full potential for rationality. This ideal speech situation, though not routinely at hand, does imply that communicative action, although always occurring in an historical context, depends also on an *a*-historical dynamic. Communicative action, or action orientated towards understanding and consensus is, therefore, to be contrasted strongly with strategic action or action orientated

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<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Habermas TCA vols. 1 & 2.

<sup>9</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 p 287.

towards success. It is strategic action, resulting from instrumental reason allied to positivism that has been the overriding theme of the Enlightenment.<sup>10</sup>

For Habermas, the concept of communicative action correlates with what he calls the 'lifeworld' that "... appears in interaction as a context of relevance, conceived not in terms of consciousness" but as a "... culturally transmitted and linguistically organised stock of interpretative patterns."<sup>11</sup> Or, as defined in Habermas's words "... the intuitively present, in this sense familiar and transparent, and at the same time vast and incalculable web of presuppositions that have to be satisfied if an utterance is to be meaningful, i.e. valid or invalid."<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, the medium or symbolic space wherein and whereby culture, social integration and personality are sustained and reproduced. Habermas contrasts the notion of lifeworld with the notion of system. The system represents material rather than symbolic reproduction and while the lifeworld is the realm of communicative action, the system is, on the contrary, typified by strategic action and governed by functional imperatives.

Habermas argues that modern societies have encountered a massive uncoupling of the system and lifeworld, and the colonisation of the latter by the

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<sup>10</sup> Positivism is the belief that there exist objective facts and that these facts are available for empirical testing. Above all, positivism stresses the possibility of explaining these facts by means of an objective testable theory, not itself linked to any one culture or tradition. This mood is particularly evident in the historical development of the natural sciences and latterly social sciences. Cf. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond secular Reason*. 1990. Basil Blackwell. Oxford.

<sup>11</sup> W. Outhwaite *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*. 1994 Polity Press Cambridge p 86.

<sup>12</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 2 p 131.

former.<sup>13</sup> Thus economy and state have been uncoupled from public and private spheres of the lifeworld. This has rendered four independent subsystems or domains which, although distinct and specialised in terms of product, rely on each other for what they do not produce. The economy produces 'money', the state 'power', the public sphere 'influence' and the private sphere 'commitment'. These products or 'media' are traded between domains. For example without the state to establish legal institutions such as contract or private property, or the public sphere to influence patterns of consumption or the private lifeworld to provide a committed workforce the economy could not produce money. Similarly these other domains depend on the distribution of the money produced by the economy.<sup>14</sup> However, the media of these domains are far from equivalent in capacity and as distinction between system and lifeworld become more pronounced then the former comes to dominate the latter. Simultaneously, the media that pertain to the system characterise social life. This is what Habermas identifies as colonisation.<sup>15</sup>

Colonisation, for Habermas, is but a symptom that suggests that rationalisation in the West has been selective and distorted. Habermas maintains, however, that although this dynamic has led to system rationalisation outstripping the lifeworld this was not inevitable. The logic of this development, therefore, allows for further lifeworld rationalisation. That is to say that the dynamic, which Habermas links to Weberian rationalisation and Marxian commodification, that sees the lifeworld become increasingly state administered, or 'juridified', and

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<sup>13</sup> See Richard Münch *Sociological Theory: Developments Since the 1960's* 1993 Nelson Hall Inc. Chicago pp 256 – 267.

<sup>14</sup> See also Crook et al *Postmodernization: Change in Advanced Society*. 1992 Sage, London p 28.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance Habermas CES Chapter 4 pp 130 – 177.



commercialised has caused the possibilities for communicative action to be diminished. This is because social participation has become subject to rationalisation in favour of immediate and instrumental returns. In human terms we encounter each other not as thinking, acting subjects but as legal entities.<sup>16</sup>

Elaborating on his theory of communicative action, Habermas develops discourse ethics in an effort to redress the imbalance of rationality mentioned earlier. Starting and departing from Kant, Habermas's principle of universalisation shifts the focus from what each can will without contradiction to be a universal law (strategic reasoning) to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm.<sup>17</sup> Thus he attempts to provide a social dimension to Kant's individualistic moral theory. In so doing, he attempts to compel the universal exchange of roles that Mead described as 'universal discourse'.<sup>18</sup> As a result, Habermas suggests that every valid norm has to fulfil the condition that "... all affected can accept the consequences and side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interest (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation.)"<sup>19</sup> This should not be confused with Habermas's principle of discourse ethics: "... only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse."<sup>20</sup> For Habermas, the principle of universalisation has to do with moral questions of justice and solidarity. These

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<sup>16</sup> Habermas CES pp 99, 116, 157 – 158.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas McCarthy *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. 1978. Hutchison, London. p 326.

<sup>18</sup> Habermas quotes from Mead *Mind, Self and Society: from the standpoint of a social behaviourist*. Morris C.W. 1934. University of Chicago Press, Chicago; "Philanthropy from the Point of View of Ethics." in *Selected Writings* Reck, A. (ed.) University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1964. in TCA vol. II pp 92 – 96. All of Habermas's writings are extensively littered with references to Mead.

<sup>19</sup> Habermas MCCA p 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid p 66.



questions pertain to formal universal solution while the principle of discourse ethics has to do with ethical questions of the good life which are only addressable in the context of substantive cultures, forms of life and individual projects. Habermas's discourse ethics accords primacy to moral questions of justice and solidarity. These two concepts are of the essence of communicative action. Justice in its modern sense, refers to the "... subjective freedom of inalienable individuality" and solidarity refers to the "... well-being of associated members of a community who intersubjectively share the same lifeworld."<sup>21</sup> He goes on to say that morality "... cannot protect the rights of the individual without also protecting the well-being of the community to which he belongs."<sup>22</sup>

This brings us to enquire into the social institutions, mechanisms and structures which are expected to facilitate discourse ethical procedures or, more generally, the public operation of reason. Habermas contends that what is required is an extension of what he calls 'substantive' democracy.<sup>23</sup> According to Habermas, this alone will afford genuine participation in the process of will formation, that is the public consensus on values and norms achieved through communicative action. This in turn depends on the rationalisation of the lifeworld via the reconstitution of the public sphere. The reconstitution of the public sphere, is the basis of Habermas's reconstructive project.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid p 200.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p 200.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas *Legitimation Crisis*. 1973 Heinemann Educational Books, London p 36.

1.2.2. *The Unfinished Project of Modernity*

From here we can trace Habermas's reconstructive project. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*<sup>24</sup> Habermas traces the development of what he calls the Enlightenment project. He notes that, although Kant established the emergence of a new critical potential for reason, it was in fact Hegel who first fully grasped the significance of modernity in the shape of a new historical consciousness: a present that cuts itself away from the past through an act by which it opens itself to the future. Habermas quotes Hegel from the preface of the *Phenomenology of Mind*:

“It is surely not difficult to see that our time is a birth and transition to a new period. The spirit has broken with what was hitherto the world of its existence and the imagination and is about to submerge all this in the past, it is at work again giving itself a new form .... (F)rivolity as well as boredom that open up in the establishment and the indeterminate apprehension of something unknown are the harbingers of a forthcoming change. This gradual crumbling ... is interrupted by the break of day, that like lightening all at once reveals the edifice of the new world.”<sup>25</sup>

If it was Hegel who was most conscious of the nature of modernity, he was also aware of the disruptive effects of the project. The division made by Kant between the intelligible and the sensible world became increasingly difficult to maintain, because either the subject was completely determined within the empirical world, or it became an empty construct, determined through empty general principles. General principles of practical reason, such as ‘treat everyone as an end in

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<sup>24</sup> In this section, unless otherwise stated, I will be drawing on Habermas's own summary of his arguments to be found in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Frederick Lawrence (trans.) 1987 (1985) Polity Press, Cambridge.

<sup>25</sup> Habermas PDM p6.

themselves', can be interpreted in any manner if one has no given conception of what constitutes these ends.<sup>26</sup>

Hegel's system was intended to be a response to the divisions occurring in his own time, as reason fragmented with the loss of metaphysical world-views. Hegel, like Kant, attempted to re-establish the unity of reason upon the principle of subjectivity. In this way, the disruptive effects of the project could be negated through the means of its own determining principle. To reconcile Kant's intelligible and sensible worlds Hegel situated the subject historically; subjects determine who they are in the course of world history. This enabled Hegel to maintain the promise of redemption held in religious world-views, whilst completing the break with unreflective traditions, emerging into a future marked by the promise of rational self-determination. By retaining the principle of subjectivity, however, Hegel could not escape the dualism of modernity. Either the subject was determined historically, in a similar manner to that in which Kant's empirical ego is determined by laws of nature, or it determines nature and history in such a way that the contingency of historical events is negated. Hegel, sympathetic to the second of these possibilities, was led ultimately to make claims about the realisation of the world subject, in which world history was interpreted through a predetermined model that became increasingly difficult to maintain. This mirrors the manner in which, for Kant, the intelligible world loses all relation to the empirical world. Historical events that contradicted Hegel's claims about the emergence of the world subject through the Prussian state, soon sent the Hegelian system crashing under the weight of historical contingency, bringing

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<sup>26</sup> Habermas PDM p23 – 44.

about a new phase in the discourse of modernity. Habermas traces the successive phases of the discourse, each perceiving itself under the temporal consciousness of modernity, as the key to a new future: unmasking the limitations and the hidden links with tradition in its predecessor, yet unable to move outside the premises of the discourse. He argues that each phase of the discourse remains caught up in the paradigm of the subject, leading to the dualism between the empirical world and the intelligible world being repeated under various guises.

In response to the thinkers who have constructed a counter-discourse to the dominant rationalising discourse of modernity, Habermas argues that far from heralding the beginning of a new age they remain within the temporal consciousness of modernity. Nietzsche, for instance, argued that it is not just teleological world-views that hold humanity enslaved. It is, rather, the very search for rational foundations for thought and action.<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche attempted to reinterpret the Enlightenment narrative of rational self-determination with one in which humanity is imprisoned through the imposition of rational structures. In particular, Habermas accuses the authors of the counter-discourse, from Nietzsche to Foucault, of lacking the conceptual resources to escape from the determining paradigm of modernity, that of subjectivity. In attempting to break out of the rational structures of modernity, the authors of the counter-discourse swing between a radicalised subjectivity or impersonal categories such as Being or Power. Discussing, for example, the second division of *Being and Time*. Habermas asserts:

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<sup>27</sup> Habermas PDM Chapter IV. "The Entry into Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Turning Point. pp 83 – 105. Nietzsche shall reappear in the thesis in Chapter 7 when we discuss the impact of limit experiences of death and suffering on critical theology and ecclesial ethics. The impact of these limit experiences unleash the spectre of nihilism which, according to both Davis and Hauerwas, can only be adequately addressed in and through a proper understanding of religious hope.

“The classical demand of *Ursprungsphilosophie* for self-grounding and ultimate grounding is not deflected but answered in the sense of a Fichtean act (*Tathandlung*) that has been modified into a world-project. *Dasein* grounds itself from itself. ‘*Dasein* grounds the world only insofar as it grounds itself in the mist of being.’ Heidegger once again grasps the world as a process out of the subjectivity of a will to self-affirmation.”<sup>28</sup>

Far from heralding the beginning of a new age, in which the objectifying attitude of rationality is replaced by an attitude in which being is allowed to present itself in modes that challenge dominant categorisations, Heidegger remains within the confines of the paradigm of consciousness. Once again the Kantian doubling of the subject can be found: either *Dasein* lies outside the world as its origin, or it is a being within the world and determined by the impersonal category of Being.

As each successive critique of modernity ends up entangled in the paradigm of subjectivity, Habermas must himself propose a means of escape from this dilemma and account for the gains and losses of the project of modernity. In response to this challenge Habermas asserts the following:

“It would be a good idea to return once again to the unmasking of the human sciences through the critique of reason, but this time in the full awareness of a fact that the successors of Nietzsche stubbornly ignore. They do not see that the philosophical discourse of modernity initiated by Kant already drew a counterreckoning for subjectivity as the principle of modernity...

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<sup>28</sup> Habermas PDM p 151.

“I have already suggested that the paradigm of the knowledge of objects has to be replaced by the paradigm of speech and action.”<sup>29</sup>

To understand where and how Habermas locates this counter-reckoning to the principle of subjectivity, we need to return briefly to his narrative of the development of modernity and examine the emergence of autonomous spheres of reason.

In his analysis of the distinguishing features of modernity, Habermas is principally influenced by Weber. It is Weber that most accurately characterises the break in modernity with traditional world-views, and the increasing rational potential of modern life. Volume One of *The Theory of Communicative Action*,<sup>30</sup> subtitled ‘Reason and the Rationalisation of Society’, is Habermas’s account of the increased rational potential of modern societies. This account is summarised in an article entitled “Modernity: An Unfinished Project”<sup>31</sup> wherein Habermas sums up Weber’s understanding of modernity:

“Max Weber characterised cultural modernity in terms of the separation of substantive reason, formerly expressed in religious and metaphysical world-views, into three moments, now capable of being connected only formally with one another (through the form of argumentative justification). In so far as the world-views have disintegrated and their traditional problems have been separated off under

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<sup>29</sup> Habermas PDM p 295.

<sup>30</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 particularly Chapter 4 pp 339 – 402.

<sup>31</sup> Habermas “Modernity: An Unfinished Project.” in (Seyla Benhabib [trans]) Hal Foster (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. 1983. Pluto Press London. pp 3 – 15. See also (N.Walker [trans]) in M Passerin D’Entreves and S Benhabib (eds.) *Habermas and The Unfinished Project of Modernity*. CUP., Cambridge 1996 pp 38 – 55. The article itself was a speech given by Habermas on receipt of the Adorno Prize in 1980.

the perspectives of truth, normative rightness and the authenticity or beauty, and can now be treated in each case as questions of knowledge, justice, or taste respectively, there arises in the modern period a differentiation of the value spheres of science and knowledge, of morality and of art. Thus scientific discourse, moral and legal enquiry, artistic production and critical practice are now institutionalised within the corresponding cultural systems as the concern of experts, and this professionalised treatment of the cultural heritage in terms of single abstract considerations of validity in each case brings to light the autonomous structures intrinsic to the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive knowledge complexes.”<sup>32</sup>

Habermas in turn accepts Weber’s insights, and hence ultimately Kant’s insights too, in re-narrating the emergence of three autonomous spheres of reason corresponding to three world relations. In relation to Kant’s First Critique,<sup>33</sup> there is an objectifying relationship to the external world; under this Habermas places the autonomous sphere of science. The type of rationality associated with this sphere is that of means-ends calculation, i.e. instrumental reason. To substantiate his theory Habermas turns to speech-act theory as a method of rational reconstruction of competencies developed in modern societies. To provide evidence for the emergence of the first sphere of reason he points to constitutive speech-acts, i.e. those that are constitutive of fact stating discourse.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid p 45.

<sup>33</sup> Immanuel Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*. Werner S. Pluhar (trans.) 1996 Hackett Publishing Co. Indianapolis.



The second of Kant's Critiques<sup>34</sup> brings to light the social world of intersubjective norms: in relation to this value sphere Habermas points to the autonomous legal and moral structures of modernity. The type of intersubjective relationship thematised here is captured in Kant's dictum of treating others as ends in themselves. The type of rationality present here cannot be the objectifying attitude of means-ends calculations. Following the categories of American psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, Habermas argues that in modernity the highest stage of moral reasoning is obtained. Participants in a moral discourse are able to abstract from their own interest positions and assume the position of each of the other participants, hence operating with a decentred rationality as opposed to instrumental rationality. This second sphere of rationality also has its own distinctive type of speech acts, regulative acts, used to establish interpersonal relations on the basis of criticisable claims to normative rightness.

Kant's third Critique, the *Critique of Judgement*,<sup>35</sup> equates with the third autonomous value sphere of modernity, that of subjectivity. Habermas suggests that the growth of autonomy in the arts is an indicator that subjectivity has freed itself from the interpretations of traditional cultures, and moved to secure its own identity. By establishing the formal concept of the external world through the autonomous spheres of science and justice, the subject is freed to ask the existential questions "Who am I?" and "Who would I like to be?"<sup>36</sup> Unlike the other two world relations, which are given in terms of validity claims linked directly with

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<sup>34</sup> Immanuel Kant *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works On The Theory of Ethics*. 6th ed. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott (trans.) Longmans, London 1959.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant *Critique of Judgement*. 1952 James Creed Meredith. (trans.). Clarendon Press, Oxford.

<sup>36</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 pp 48 –74.



action, subjectivity is expressed through the world-disclosing power of language. The idea that the world is disclosed through language can be traced back to Wilhelm Humboldt in the German tradition, and is appropriated by Heidegger in his conception of truth as an event of concealment and unconcealment.<sup>37</sup> What distinguishes Habermas from Heidegger and the postmoderns is his claim that subjectivity is also connected to criticisable validity claims, in such a manner that the learning potential of modernity is retained:

“Meaning could not exhaust validity. Heidegger jumped to conclusions in identifying the disclosure of meaning-horizons with the truth of meaningful utterances: it is only the conditions for the validity of utterances that change with the horizon of meaning - the changed understanding has to prove itself in dealing with what can come within its horizon.”<sup>38</sup>

The critical potential of reason is maintained, whilst subjectivity is guaranteed its autonomy, and is detached from the paradigm of the transcendent subject creating the external world. Expressive speech acts are constitutive of the third value sphere of modernity; they are raised and criticised on the basis of authenticity and truthfulness.<sup>39</sup> This understanding of the three aspects of rationality, each with its own autonomous realm in the modern world, put in place the theoretical constructs with which to carry out a detailed and thorough critique of modernity, with the practical aim of correcting the social costs of the project. For Habermas, modernity is indeed an advance on traditional societies. It is not simply, however, the disenchantment of traditional world-views that has brought about the ills of modernity, nor the advancement of rational structures. Rather it is the one-sided manner in which the project has been worked out.

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<sup>37</sup> Heidegger *op cit.* pp 218 – 228. Habermas PDM pp 64, 138, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Habermas PDM p 320.

<sup>39</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 p 10, 32, & 302 – 309.

This one-sided development has led to the emphasising of the world-objectifying attitude of instrumental rationality. As mentioned above, the disruptive effect of the Enlightenment had already been grasped by Hegel. Habermas continues this critique, tracing a line that runs from Hegel, through the young Hegelians to Marx with his theory of exploitation. It is taken up, in a version closest to Weber by Lukacs, and his followers in the Frankfurt school. From this 'school' it is in the writings of Adorno and Horkheimer that this critique of reason, for Habermas, reaches its most complete, yet most negative expression.<sup>40</sup> This legacy of the critique of modernity was significant because it had effectively unmasked the dark underside of the Enlightenment rhetoric of progress and emancipation. However, the negative dialectic of Adorno and Horkheimer still needed to perform the positive task of accounting for its own normative foundations, and put forward a possible alternative to a legacy of instrumental reason.

The distinguishing feature of Habermas's positive, reconstructive solution to the dilemmas of modernity is his contention that modernity has always carried the means of its own redemption. From its inception, modernity has carried the means for understanding action and rationality in terms other than those of instrumental reason.<sup>41</sup> The second autonomous world relation, that which brings

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<sup>40</sup> In fact Adorno entitled one of his works *Negative Dialectics* Ashton, E.B. (trans.) 1990 (1973) Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

<sup>41</sup> Instrumental reason allied to positivism is one of the ills of modernity that holds sway when subjectivity, autonomy and causal laws collide. It is to be contrasted with communicative reason. Davis WLWD p 71.

about the development of norms of action on the basis of a decentred reason, carries with it the promise of emancipation from unjust structures. The German tradition was unable to step beyond the paradigm of consciousness, lacking an adequate conception of this decentred, intersubjective concept of reason. In order to develop this concept, Habermas looks outside the German tradition, to the American pragmatist school of Pierce and Mead. This move provides the conceptual tools to move beyond the object centred approach of traditional ontology and the subject-object relation of consciousness theories.<sup>42</sup> Instrumental rationality resulted from the legacy of the paradigm of consciousness; either the subject determines the world through the imposition of universal laws, or it is determined itself by general laws. In moving to the paradigm of communication, Habermas attempts to overcome the dualism of the paradigm of consciousness. No longer is the subject determined by the world, or the determinant of the world: instead the world is disclosed through intersubjective procedures of rationality, by a plurality of subjects offering and criticising validity claims in three worlds. Habermas argues that, with the move to the paradigm of communicative reason, the legacy of metaphysical thinking, according to which the multiplicity of existents is placed under an abstract concept, is avoided.

Such a move, going as it does beyond metaphysical theories, and entering into a new age of post-metaphysical thinking, allows Habermas to take up the traditional question of the unity of reason. Traditional world-views, with their substantive concepts of reason, bring about an objectifying attitude to the lifeworld. That is to say the world of everyday action and interaction.

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<sup>42</sup> See Habermas PT p 121.

Objectification produces a false unity that prevents the establishment of reflective rational structures, which emerge through the three value spheres of modernity.

“The linguistic world-view is reified as open to criticism. Within such a system of orientation, actions cannot reach that critical zone in which communicatively achieved agreement depends upon autonomous yes/no responses to criticisable validity claims.”<sup>43</sup>

The unity of reason that Habermas proposes is a formal unity. In order to retain its independence, each sphere of reason is to be kept in harmony with the other two. Wherever there develops a one-sided emphasis on one particular moment of reason a ‘health-warning’ will alert us to the possible dangers.

“If we do not want altogether to relinquish standards by which a form of life might be judged to be more or less failed, deformed, unhappy or alienated, we can look if need be to the model of sickness and health.”<sup>44</sup>

There is to be no overall meta-narrative on the relation between the three spheres, such narratives representing a return to metaphysical, forced conceptions of unity.

Rationality that attains its unity on a formal procedural basis, can no longer be characterised in terms of a particular substantive conception of the good life. Instead it is to be seen in terms of certain procedural limits that are placed on the establishment of intersubjective structures, within which a variety of traditions and conceptions of the good can flourish. Social unity is not achieved on the basis of one dominant tradition, but through a variety of traditions co-existing through

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<sup>43</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 p 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid p 73.

the medium of communicative reason. Habermas seeks, therefore, to provide theoretical foundations for the two phenomena of modernity that, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, have often been perceived to be incompatible: that is to say, the increase in the diversity of forms of life and the increase in universal structures of rationality.<sup>45</sup>

In conclusion, we can see that for Habermas there is to be no retrieval of a period prior to modernity, the only positive foundation for a critique of modern life is to be found in the project that Habermas develops following a line from Kant through Hegel and Marx, to Weber and Adorno. This project entails breaking with substantive reason and the establishment of three autonomous complexes of reason, captured in the three decentred world relations that develop out of Kant's three critiques. The promise of redemption, inherent in metaphysical or religious world-views is redeployed in terms of redemption from oppressive social structures and is, thus, held open. Meanwhile, the utopianism of Marx, with his narrative of the emergence of the emancipatory proletariat subject, and the pessimism of the Frankfurt school are avoided.<sup>46</sup> The individual is able to assert his or her independence from traditional teleological world-views, through the operation of procedures of reason in the three spheres of modernity. Each individual is able to shape his or her own existence, not through the paradigm of consciousness, but through equal and reciprocal participation in discourses spanning the three worlds. No one world-view is to be privileged in these discourses and no interpretation is to be final, the procedures of rationality offer

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<sup>45</sup> See Habermas PT p 140.

<sup>46</sup> See A. Wellmer, "Reason, Utopia and Enlightenment." In R.J. Bernstein (ed.) *Habermas and Modernity*, 1985. C.U.P. Cambridge. pp 35 – 36.

the possibility of challenging any given interpretation. Habermas attempts to correct and go beyond his predecessors through recovering a potential for liberation that is to be found within modernity itself, through the paradigm of communicative reason.

### 1.3. Alasdair MacIntyre: A Return to Substantive Reason

If Habermas can be seen as a contemporary defender of modernity, Alasdair MacIntyre should be seen as one of its most hostile critics. Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian<sup>47</sup> project attempts to show how the liberal individualism of the Enlightenment has irretrievably damaged moral thinking. He argues that standards of rational justification and of moral decision making themselves emerge from a particular history, or more precisely community with a shared history or narrative. Embracing a neo-Aristotelian position, MacIntyre provides a powerful challenge to Habermas's re-constructionist programme. It is the purpose of this section to explore MacIntyre's return to substantive reason. By this I mean his call for a return to strong contextualism that ties the identity of the agent to the substantive judgements of a particular tradition. I shall execute this exploration by, first of all presenting some of the concerns that MacIntyre has in common with Habermas and then move on to an exploration of his alternative critique of modernity.

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<sup>47</sup> Other epithets for communitarianism are in common usage and generally delineate particular subsets of interest within the general category communitarian. Thus terms such as neo-Aristotelianism or civic republicanism describe the work of philosophers, ethicists and sociologists who may be broadly defined as communitarian. Philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel and Michael Walzer and sociologists such as Robert Bellah, Amitai Etzioni, and Philip Selznick, fall into this category but, would not, generally, describe themselves as communitarians. Nevertheless, with this disclaimer in place, for ease of description we shall employ the term communitarian with regard to MacIntyre. See Kymlicka *Contemporary Political Philosophy*. Chapter 6 pp 199 – 238.

*1.3.1. Common Concerns in MacIntyre and Habermas*

Although profoundly antagonistic to each other's project MacIntyre and Habermas, in fact, share some concerns. The areas of shared concern can be listed as: critical interest in the social sciences as descriptive of the state of modernity; interest in narrative accounts of moral reasoning; interest in ethical questions of the good life, substantive cultures, forms of life and individual projects. In this section we shall briefly outline these concerns as a means of relating the one to the other.

Both MacIntyre and Habermas have a long-standing interest in the social sciences, and both attempt to overcome the division between these sciences and philosophy. For MacIntyre, as for Habermas, it is Weber who most accurately provides an analysis of our modern self-understanding "...[t]he contemporary vision of the world, so I have suggested, is predominantly, although not always in detail, Weberian."<sup>48</sup> Needless to say, the narrative account MacIntyre gives of the development of this contemporary vision differs on several key issues to that account developed by Habermas. For MacIntyre, far from representing the development of distinct rational structures, through which humanity liberates itself from the dogma of tradition, the Weberian vision of modernity "... cannot be rationally sustained; it disguises and conceals rather than illuminates and it depends for its power on its success at disguise and concealment."<sup>49</sup> It is the Enlightenment belief in universally accessible first principles of enquiry that has

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<sup>48</sup> MacIntyre AV p 109.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid p 109.





led to the breakdown of rational discourse in modern societies. In response, he develops a model of rational ethics closely identifiable with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and proceeds to use this to analyse the fundamental incoherence and disorder of the contemporary moral climate as he sees it. That is to say, the Enlightenment has established a distorted choice between monism and radical existentialism.<sup>50</sup>

Like Habermas, MacIntyre has an interest in ethical questions of the good life which are only addressable in the context of substantive cultures, forms of life and individual projects: this interest extends to a concern with practical reasoning. What is at stake here between the likes of Habermas and MacIntyre, however, is the scope of the context that we have to acknowledge as necessary for coherent moral discourse. MacIntyre argues, therefore, that to resolve the moral problems of modernity we have to take into account the context for making decisions and the basis for accepting one theoretical resolution over another is:

“...the rational superiority of that particular structure to all previous attempts within that particular tradition to formulate such theories and principles; it is not a matter of those first principles being acceptable to all rational persons whatsoever.”<sup>51</sup>

This is a direct attack on the liberal universal ideal of all competent participants being the basis for the validity of a norm. Clearly, in MacIntyre's terms the community or tradition would be quite sharply defined as those sharing a

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<sup>50</sup> Janet Martin Soskice in her reply to Robin Gill “Community and Morality ‘After Modernity’ a Reply to Robin Gill.” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 1995 vol8 No1. p14 – 19.

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre WJWR p 8.



teleological context that, if lost, would generate problems which could not be solved in modern moral philosophy. In this context, practical reasoning is best understood as self discovery in relation to a tradition of discourse insofar as we approach our own circumstances as "... bearers of a particular social identity ... Hence, what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles."<sup>52</sup> There is an underlying fear that without the community actively encouraging them individuals will drift into atomistic isolation. Hence even reason is at the behest of the tradition or community.<sup>53</sup>

It is at this point that the relationship between tradition, culture and society is made or broken. All ethical systems, MacIntyre argues, must be contextual, reflecting the community in which they are born and the traditions that the community inherits. In rejecting a notion of universally valid ethics he asserts that justification of ethical decisions can only be on the basis of examination of our own tradition and that of others with reference to whom we act. This context has been described in terms of the common good. The common good is a substantive conception of the good life that defines the community's way of life. In other words this brings us back to the realm of culture. The common good, rather than adjusting itself to the pattern of people's preferences, provides a standard by which those preferences are evaluated. One of the problems for communitarians arises when it comes to guaranteeing the common good and protecting virtue in its normative sense. The governance of the culture of the common good has to be extremely strong and should encourage people to adopt its conception of the good

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<sup>52</sup> MacIntyre AV p 220.

<sup>53</sup> MacIntyre AV p 225 "What I have tried to spell out ... is the kind of understanding of social life which the tradition of the virtues requires, a kind of understanding very different from those dominant in the culture of bureaucratic individualism."

rather than another. This governance will involve a public ranking of the value of different ways of life,<sup>54</sup> within a teleologically orientated perspective, alongside high boundaries determining who and what is in and out of the community. There are two implications of this view, one negative and the other positive. The first, negative, implication is the accusation that authoritarianism rather than modern liberal self-determination characterises MacIntyre's virtue ethics. To counter this accusation one might suggest that liberalism in supporting self-determination, in fact, underplays the social conditions necessary for some level of self-determination. Consequently, some limits on self-determination are necessary to preserve the conditions necessary to enable the possibility of self-determination. Hence, some level of authority is necessary simply to enable self-determination and the accusation is softened into a matter of degrees.<sup>55</sup> However, the second, positive, implication is that MacIntyre's position necessarily presupposes an alternative critique of modernity to that of modern liberalism.

### 1.3.2 *An Alternative Critique of Modernity.*

We are now in a position to assess MacIntyre's account of modernity and modernity's incoherence as a backdrop for ethical discourse. *After Virtue* is MacIntyre's account of the breakdown of the Enlightenment project, the failure of the attempt to justify ethics without the foundations of a teleological conception of

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<sup>54</sup> It should be pointed out that a false dichotomy has been generated between the politics of liberalism and politics of the common good. Liberalism has an idea of the common good which is a precondition of liberal egalitarian activity. Liberals conceive of policies that promote the interests of all members of their group. See Kymlika *An Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory*. pp 206 – 208.

<sup>55</sup> See Kymlika *Ibid* pp 216 – 230, and Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers II*. 1985. CUP, Cambridge. p 190 – 191.

human nature.<sup>56</sup> In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* he takes up and develops these themes within a more comprehensive account of practical reasoning. His central claim in this later work is that reason arises in and develops from particular traditions; there is no such thing as reason outside of a tradition of enquiry. The Enlightenment project of establishing a pure principle of reason, acceptable to any rational agent irrespective of the tradition in which they are immersed, was destined to failure:

“There is no standing ground, no place for enquiry, no way to engage in the practices of advancing, evaluating accepting, and rejecting reasoned arguments apart from the that which is provided by some particular tradition or other.”<sup>57</sup>

Most importantly for MacIntyre the current, incoherent state of ethical discourse gained momentum when Enlightenment thought removed ethical terms and concepts from the tradition in which they were originally developed. Hence they have lost their substantive meanings, becoming mere fragments of a once rich discourse. The fragmentation of ethical discourse cleared the way for the establishment of emotivist theories, and the development of the emotivist culture with which we are now left. For MacIntyre, it is Nietzsche who has most accurately characterised the breakdown of rational justification in modernity. It is Nietzsche who also draws the ultimate conclusion from the failure of the

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<sup>56</sup> In regard to the problems generated by the lack of teleological ordering, but this time in regard to the social sciences, we encounter the similar sentiments in John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*.

<sup>57</sup> MacIntyre WJWR p 350.

Enlightenment project, disposing of even the emotivist appeal to inner sentiments. MacIntyre refers to a famous passage in the *Gay Science*:<sup>58</sup>

“Nietzsche jeers at the notion of basing morality on inner sentiments, on conscience, on the one hand, or on the Kantian categorical imperative, on universalizability on the other. In five swift, witty and cogent paragraphs he disposes of both what I have called the Enlightenment project to discover rational foundations for an objective morality and of the confidence of the everyday moral agent in the post-Enlightenment culture that his moral practice and utterance are in good order.”<sup>59</sup>

Nietzsche's positive proposal to replace the Enlightenment project consists in the inversion of this picture. It is not through rational argument that we are to become truly human, but through an heroic act of the will in which we fashion our own laws representing how we choose to view ourselves. Through confronting the Enlightenment project and drawing it to its ultimate conclusion, MacIntyre argues that Nietzsche represents one of the two possible alternatives that confront us today:

“What the conjunction of philosophical and historical argument reveals is that either one must follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic or one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have commenced in the first place.”<sup>60</sup>

The alternative MacIntyre proposes to the conclusions of Nietzsche, consists in the return to an older tradition of rational enquiry, one which “... is philosophically

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<sup>58</sup> Nietzsche *Gay Science* 1974. Kaufmann, W. (trans.) Vintage Books, New York section 3.3.5

<sup>59</sup> MacIntyre AV p 113.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid p118.

the most powerful of pre-modern modes of moral thought. If a pre-modern view of morals and politics is to be vindicated against modernity, it will be in something like Aristotelian terms or not at all.”<sup>61</sup> MacIntyre develops this theme in his subsequent works, endorsing that development of Aristotle’s thought that resulted in the synthesis of Aquinas.

The conception of the Enlightenment narrative developed by MacIntyre is broadly the antithesis of that offered by Habermas. For Habermas, reason frees itself from pre-modern teleological world-views in order to release its critical potential. In contrast, for MacIntyre, removed from the unifying teleological ordering of the Aristotelian tradition, reason fragments and modernity is characterised by a series of unresolvable debates. Though the origins of the Enlightenment are complex, MacIntyre traces them, in part, to the new conceptions of reason and human nature that were developed in late medieval thought. This new conception of reason and human nature was later taken up and developed by both the Protestant reformers and Jansenist Catholicism.<sup>62</sup> Charles Taylor, in an article on MacIntyre,<sup>63</sup> traces the development from its theological roots of this Enlightenment conception of reason and nature. In late medieval scholasticism, although Aristotelianism had been developed as the most powerful of pre-modern philosophies, achieving a definitive synthesis in the works of Aquinas, controversy still raged as to the compatibility of the Greek and Christian world-views. In particular Occam and other nominalists argued that the Greek

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid p188.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid p 53.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor in “Justice After Virtue.” in J. Horton & S. Mendus (eds.) *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*. 1994. CUP. Cambridge. pp16-43.

conception of the cosmos, ordered to a fixed telos in accordance with principles of reason, was incompatible with the Christian doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

The ancient debate concerning whether God is constrained by principles of reason, or if God is free to decide the laws of reason is re-enacted at the entry into modernity. Some of the key concepts of modernity can be seen to originate in this debate. In order to assert the sovereignty of God, Occam is led to conceive of nature as value neutral material, onto which God wills his commandments. In modernity, Taylor says, this sovereignty is transferred to humanity, resulting in the modern emphasis on the autonomy of reason:

“... reason is no longer defined substantively in terms of a vision of cosmic order, but formally, in terms of the procedures that thought ought to follow, and especially those involved in fitting means to ends, instrumental reason, the hegemony of reason is consequently redefined, and now means are not ordered according to the vision of order, but rather controlling desires by the canons of instrumental reason.”<sup>64</sup>

Nature is characterised as a mechanical substrate, and the newly developing natural sciences are perceived as methods for describing the causal regularities of this substrate. It was not the development of the natural sciences that brought about this manner of conceiving of nature: the natural sciences were readily interpreted on this model of a value-neutral universe. Hence the development of modern complexes of knowledge in the natural sciences does not automatically entail the breakdown of a teleological conception of nature. Another consequence of this

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid p 19.

conception of nature is the fact/value distinction so influential in modern ethics. This is manifested in the Kantian distinction between the sensible and the intelligible worlds. Taylor follows MacIntyre in arguing that this Enlightenment conception of reason and nature cannot function in a coherent manner.<sup>65</sup>

This account of the origins of modernity has brought to light the manner in which, for MacIntyre, reason and nature are torn apart. The result of this division for ethics is the destruction of a once complete scheme of ethical development into incoherent fragments. This fragmentation is summed up, by MacIntyre, in the following passage:

“... a threefold scheme in which human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be (human nature in its untutored state) is initially discrepant and discordant with the precepts of ethics and needs to be transformed by the instructions of practical reason and experience into human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realised-its-*telos*.”<sup>66</sup>

The Enlightenment, in abandoning the third element in this scheme leaves but two fragments of a once complete scheme, the relationship between which is left unclear. That is to say we are left with a twofold scheme where human nature in its untutored state is expected to appreciate and operate in light of ethical precepts without any teleological framework wherein practical reason can function. Thus there is no possibility of discerning what it might mean to live a good life. At this

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 16 – 43. Taylor is inclined to argue against MacIntyre and claims that modernity actually encompasses a substantive ethic which can be understood as different from, and even an advance, on previous ethics. This divergence derives from Taylor’s understanding of the relationship between substantive ethical practice and the ethical meta-theory wherein and whereby it is interpreted.

<sup>66</sup> MacIntyre AV p 53.



point we turn to the explanatory scheme MacIntyre develops from Aristotle and Aquinas, a scheme that is integral to any account of rational discourse:

“... any rational justification of the place assigned to the archai/principia in that perfect understanding which provides the activities of the mind with its telos/finis is likewise inseparable from the rational justification of that scheme of teleological ordering as a whole.”<sup>67</sup>

In placing the Enlightenment in relation to the late medieval debates that preceded it, MacIntyre can be seen as continuing a narrative that was developed in this century by Thomists such as Etienne Gilson.<sup>68</sup> In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* MacIntyre locates the origins of the Enlightenment in late medieval scholasticism, in particular the works of Scotus.<sup>69</sup> Having demonstrated how modern moral philosophy has its origins in Scotus’s theory of the will, MacIntyre then traces the effects of Scotus’s doctrines on the unity of reason:

“In a parallel way Scotus’s doctrine of the soul’s immediate intuitive knowledge of singulars, so that the singular is intelligible - even if only somewhat so - in independence of the universal, both transforms the

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<sup>67</sup> MacIntyre FPFE p 45.

<sup>68</sup> Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. 1955 Sheed and Ward. London. In this work Gilson argues that the late medieval rejection of Aquinas’s metaphysics results from a misinterpretation of his doctrine of esse and entia. He argues that the successors of Aquinas, failing to grasp the subtlety of the doctrine, rejected its solution to the problem of universals. This led ultimately to the rejection of any notion of universals or natures, a rejection that Taylor traces in Occam. MacIntyre says that the likes of Gilson “... in retrieving stage by scholarly stage the historical understanding of what Aquinas himself said, wrote and did recovered for us an understanding of what is distinctive about the mode of enquiry elaborated in its classical and most adequate form by Aquinas. The greatest names in this line of descent are those of Grabman, Mandonnet, Gilson, Van Steenburgen and Weisheipl, a list in which those who appear later have sometimes had to correct as well as to supplement their predecessors’ scholarship...” TRV p 77

<sup>69</sup> MacIntyre TRV p 155 “Scotus thus not only made possible but provoked a good deal of moral philosophy, directly and indirectly, from Occam all the way to Kant.”



conception of intelligibility and places constraints upon how the relationship of particular to universal can be understood, in such a way as to generate a new problematic for the about to emerge academic discipline of metaphysics or first philosophy. Paradoxically Scotus, whose philosophical enquiries were at every point controlled by his theological conclusions and whose primary interest was in protecting the autonomy of Augustinian theology from the inroads of either Averroist or Thomistic Aristotelianism, set the scene instead for the emergence of philosophy as an autonomous discipline or set of disciplines, with its own defining problematic.”<sup>70</sup>

MacIntyre thus suggests that the rejection of Thomism by Scotus provided the impetus for the Enlightenment fragmentation of reason. The Enlightenment, the age of critical reason, did not arise as a result of the replacement of dogmatic, traditional world-views with critical reason, but through the misinterpretation of Aquinas’s project for the teleological ordering of the sciences.

#### 1.4. Habermas and MacIntyre: challenging opponents

It is now clear that Habermas and MacIntyre offer two opposing accounts of the development of modernity, with two rival versions of reason and its unity. Habermas argues that with the Enlightenment there emerges a new potential for reason, and traditional teleological ordering of world-views is replaced. The challenge MacIntyre, as a representative of the tradition of virtue ethics, offers to Habermas is to develop a positive conception of reason outside the explanatory scheme of a teleological ordering of principles of reason. Habermas argues that the unity of reason can be established formally, and that his theory of communicative

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<sup>70</sup> MacIntyre TRV p 156.

reason provides the means of achieving this formal unity on a procedural basis. He provides a paradigm for this conception, one that he argues is superior to those of ontology and consciousness: that of equal and reciprocal relationships between the participants in a discourse. By means of this paradigm, Habermas intends to resolve traditional metaphysical problems.

The challenge that Habermas, as a representative of discourse ethics, issues to MacIntyre is to provide a substantive account of the unity of reason that is compatible with the emergence of differing traditions in modern life. That is, an account that does not represent the forced assimilation of one form of life to another. To this end MacIntyre develops a differing account of 'communicative reason' one that pays respect to cultural diversity, whilst attempting to maintain the explanatory scheme developed by Aristotle, and adopted in the middle ages by a variety of traditions. He also develops a different account of the Enlightenment: far from representing an increase in rational potential, the Enlightenment can only be understood in terms of the late medieval breakdown of that tradition of rational enquiry that results in the synthesis of Aquinas. If we are to understand the dualism and divisions of modernity it will be through tracing these debates. Rather than representing the emergence of autonomous complexes of knowledge, the three world relations that emerge, as Habermas identifies them, in modernity are, according to MacIntyre, the result of certain metaphysical presuppositions that emerge with the rejection of Thomism. MacIntyre argues that through returning to the writings of St. Thomas, we are able to comprehend how the unity of reason is to be established.

On these grounds alone it is clear that there is a theological dimension to this debate. However, Habermas and MacIntyre's competing conceptions of rationality represent constructive attempts to respond to the contemporary disenchantment with the conditions of modernity. As such, they present the theologian with serious issues that relate precisely to the viability, nature and task of theology. We shall, in the next section, pick up the specific theological matters arising from Habermas and MacIntyre's critiques as the point of departure for introducing our two theological protagonists, namely the critical theology of Charles Davis and the ecclesial theology of Stanley Hauerwas.

## 1.5. From Critical Theory to Critical Theology

Having explored the two critiques of modernity from whence Charles Davis and Stanley Hauerwas draw their philosophical insight, we are now in a position to pin-point and assess some of the theological matters arising from them. To this end, prior to introducing critical theology and ecclesial ethics, we shall explore Habermas's and MacIntyre's considerations of religion.

### *1.5.1. Habermas on Religion.*

Within Habermas's theory of communicative reason, based as it is on the reciprocal relationship between participants, the functions of social integration and expression, first fulfilled by religious ritual practice, pass over into communicative action: in this way the authority of the sacred is progressively replaced by the

authority of a linguistic consensus.<sup>71</sup> In other words, integration at the social level, resulting from adherence to a mythical meaning horizon, is replaced by integration by mutual accord and co-operation resulting from authentic communication. As bourgeois privatised religion flourishes, Habermas argues, then the sacred loses whatever public authority it might have possessed. In this move from the sacred to the sphere of communicative practice, cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation profoundly modify the shape of the interaction as well as being influenced by it.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, the role of religion in the public sphere is profoundly undermined. Indeed, Habermas consigns religion to the private sphere. In this section we shall explore the rationale behind this attenuation of the role of religion in the public sphere.

In the second volume of *Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas suggests that Emile Durkhiem correctly shows how the generalised other can be religiously symbolised.<sup>73</sup> Religion, then, was the ground for morality and the impetus behind social integration. Habermas, however, goes beyond this stage and shows that the sacred moral authority has been replaced by the linguistic action of a community attempting to reach understanding and consensus. All that is left for religion, then, is "... nothing more and nothing other than the secular principles of

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<sup>71</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 2.

<sup>72</sup> This reciprocal relationship between the process of communication and the culture in which it happens, as we shall see, plays an extremely important role in Davis's theological readings of Habermas, and hence in his critical theology.

<sup>73</sup> William J Meyer "Private Faith or Public Religion? An Assessment of Habermas's Changing view of Religion." *The Journal of Religion* 75 1995 pp371 - 391.

a universalist ethic of responsibility.”<sup>74</sup> Habermas saw this advance as both logical and necessary. At its heart lies the contention that:

“... modern structures of rationality have evolved or developed to the point where they represent a genuine logical advance over the rational structures found in religious and metaphysical world views ... That is to say Habermas believes there is and has been an evolutionary development from myth to metaphysics to modern communicative rationality.”<sup>75</sup>

This process reflects a major criterion of Habermas’s theory, which is that development involves differentiation. The differentiation of reason mentioned earlier is concomitant with a differentiation in culture. Culture has been divided into three distinct value spheres: science, morality and law, and art. Each of these spheres has its own logic that spawns its own expert sub-culture.

According to Habermas, differentiation was made possible by what he calls the ‘linguistification of the sacred’<sup>76</sup> which, in turn, released an “... unfettering of the rationality potential of action oriented to mutual understanding.”<sup>77</sup> Clearly it is the case that rational and cultural differentiation opens up the possibility of rational public criticism. That is to say it opens up the possibility for authentic public discourse on truth and ethical claims. This runs contrary to the pre-modern world-view that, he maintains, in fact inhibited public discourse. Public discourse,

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<sup>74</sup> Habermas “Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in This World” In Browning and Fiorenza eds. ) *Habermas Modernity and Public Theology*. 1992. Crossroads, New York. pp 226 - 250.

<sup>75</sup> William J Meyer op cit. It is clear from this and other writings that Habermas’s criterion for development is reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined as the ability to revise, question and criticise fundamental questions and claims.

<sup>76</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 2 p 77 - 111

<sup>77</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 2 p288.

in the modern sense, was not possible in the religious world-view precisely because the underlying claims, for instance the notion of God, cannot be exposed to rational criticism or argumentative doubt and therefore lacked reflexivity. Furthermore, the programme pursued in the religious world-view was totalising in so far as it moulded together the different validity claims and values of culture.<sup>78</sup> The modern world, however, is one of plurality and diversity. There can be no place, therefore, for totalising public conceptions of the good. Religious world-views as carriers of such notions are, consequently, deemed obsolete. As the autonomous spheres of value develop another problem arises, that is a problem of mediation: the mediation of art to life, or of theory to practice. According to Habermas, since Hegel, there has been a corresponding problem of relating morality to the ethical life: this has

“less to do with an expressive attitude towards the social world than with the fact that the insights of a postconventional morality would remain without any impact on real life unless morality is anchored in concrete forms of ethical life.”<sup>79</sup>

In discourse the participants can test the claims mentioned above and relate themselves to the existential context of the concrete forms of ethical life.<sup>80</sup>

Historically, of course, there are examples of religious discourse that have been, evidently, the media of cultural and social development.<sup>81</sup> At the present juncture, however, Habermas would suggest that the obsolete religious world-

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<sup>78</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1 p203.

<sup>79</sup> Habermas in “Questions and Counterquestions.” in Richard Bernstein (ed.) *Habermas and Modernity*, 1985. Polity Press, Cambridge. p 209

<sup>80</sup> Rudolf J. Siebert *The Critical Theory of Religion*. pp8 – 11.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p11.

views can no longer contribute to social or personal identity because of their totalising conceptions of the good. Consequently, rational discourse is burdened with "... that task to constitute brotherly-sisterly communication community, which religion can no longer fulfil."<sup>82</sup> Hence, the high regard and high task attributed to rational discourse in Habermas's thought. Another feature arising from this task is Habermas's redeployment of the promise of redemption of religious world-views. This redeployment is to a task in which intersubjectivity and interaction mediate and form the crux of an extremely complex social philosophy. This complexity is absolutely essential, however, because without it one could not account for the vast complexity of action systems that we encounter as a direct result of "... the differentiation of the late modern system of human condition and human action systems including culture, society, personality and biological organism."<sup>83</sup>

In the final analysis, if Habermas's theory of secularisation and differentiation is correct then religion, quite simply, cannot survive the secularisation of its content in the modern age and, failing to answer or explain the world adequately, can only survive in the private sphere.<sup>84</sup> It should be noted, however, that Habermas himself recognises the significance of religion at the private existential level. By extension, because the public sphere is made up of private individuals with differing concerns,<sup>85</sup> religion will have a secondary effect on the public sphere. Ultimately, though, authority is vested not in religious claims to authority but in the linguistic dynamic that informs and structures

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p12.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p213.

<sup>84</sup> Jean-Louis Schlegel "Reconcile la modernité avec elle-même" *Esprit* 10 1987 p 119.

<sup>85</sup> Davis WLWD pp 42, 83 & 99.



communicative interaction: this is the authority wherein social energies are focused. Consequently, the ritual practices that informed the role of religion for wider society are useless and out of date. But since neither science nor the arts can claim to be the heirs to religion; in this respect only discursive ethics and communicative morality turn out to substitute for the authority of the sacred.<sup>86</sup> Religion, thus disinherited, no matter how well intentioned, cannot in any way maintain a viable place in the public sphere. For instance, it would be well nigh impossible for theology to contribute to an understanding of justice or aid in its delivery. Neither has it any real significant contribution to make to identity or political action. It is, therefore, correctly consigned to the private sphere.

Communicative action, on the other hand, is action directed at reaching an understanding among people trying to come to an agreement. It occurs when two or more persons actually seek to reach an uncoerced agreement about their common situation in order to cooperate and co-ordinate their efforts. As we have seen, the problem with modernity is the lopsided development of rational discourse. We have suffered under one form of rationality, the purposive or strategic holding sway at the expense of the communicative in the public sphere. Communicative rationality, according to Habermas, is not a rationality among others that may be chosen or not chosen. It is implicit in, and integral to, the human need to communicate and cooperate. The rationalisation of communicative action means overcoming the forces that systematically distort human

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<sup>86</sup> See Habermas TCA Vol. 2 p 92 and the introduction to this thesis note 13.



communication, hinder social interaction and produce structures of domination.<sup>87</sup>In other words, it is a drive towards liberation.

### 1.5.2. *The Threads of Davis's Critical Theology*

The focus on liberation in Habermas's thought brings us to Charles Davis's explorations of the Habermasian form of critical theory. These explorations are steps on the way to his search for a new religious identity. As he says, a "... post-conventional, universalistic religious identity, both personal and social, not tied to the fixed contents and norms of any one tradition nor to any permanent collective body, alone corresponds to the present level of human social development."<sup>88</sup> In the world of 'posts', Davis's position might, most conveniently, be described as one of post-orthodoxy and an exegesis of his fundamental claim, embodied in *Theology and Political Society*, that theology today ought to be concerned with the relation between faith and social practice. It would be fair to say that in making this claim Davis picks up on two central themes in Habermas's work: that is to say the themes of emancipation or liberation and the theme of praxis. From this understanding coupled with the intuition that theology does not operate in a vacuum, nor is self sufficient, Davis makes his argument. That is to say, if theology is to realise its nature and fulfil its task it must enter into a reciprocal relationship with the culture in which it finds itself.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Davis RMS pp 26 and 194.

<sup>88</sup> Charles Davis RMS p 152.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Davis "Theology for Tomorrow" Chapter 1 of TPCT. pp 23 - 31.

To understand the nature and task of critical theology for Davis one must appreciate that at the heart of his theology lies the issue of the distinction between faith and belief:

“The absoluteness of faith is the absoluteness of total demand and total response in an experience of unrestricted love in relation to hidden transcendence or mystery. Faith is the drive towards transcendence the thrust of human beings out of and beyond themselves to the totality of existence and reach unlimited reality and ultimate value. It is total response to felt reality of total demand. That absoluteness should not be confused with certitude and beliefs.”<sup>90</sup>

This suggests that faith is mystical insofar as mysticism equates to the drive towards the transcendent. As mystical it defies any particular claim to religious knowledge. He can suggest, therefore, that communicative action points beyond itself, but not necessarily to anything that must be called anything. The content of faith is, then, constantly open to revision and new experience, it is critical and, in Habermas’s terms, reflexive. Belief, however, falls into the category of orthodoxy that presumes that knowledge is foundational for religious faith. In understanding faith as prior to belief, Davis rejects fideism because “...Christian Faith is a transformative principle, not a body of objective knowledge.”<sup>91</sup> For Davis it follows that, as a transformative principle, faith leads directly to praxis. Christian practice is response to the reality of a transcendent gift or revelation. So, despite any Marxist notion of the primacy of practice there is also a particular religious reason for not denying the primacy of praxis. He says,

“The message of revelation is a praxis, an ethical life, a way of being and acting. It may be partially

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<sup>90</sup> Davis WLWD p67.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p78.

articulated in propositions. It may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a practical way of life.”<sup>92</sup>

This way of being, or praxis is, therefore, to be understood as a negation of those types of theology which themselves subordinate the transformative principle of faith to orthodoxy. Thus the nature of theology is essentially practical. Consequently, the task of theology now must be understood as the recreation of society in light of a transformative faith.

For Davis, critical theology, as an articulation of the possibility of transformation, is tied to faith and not to belief. Through this relationship he has attempted to construct a valid practical theology to counter the “... inadequate model of Christian community...”<sup>93</sup> encountered in the church and the priesthood which he left.<sup>94</sup> In this light, critical theology is defined as theology which engages in the process of emancipatory reflection on the life of praxis in reciprocal relationship to the culture that shapes it.

## 1.6. From Virtue Ethics to Ecclesial Ethics

As we have seen, MacIntyre has much to say on the fusion of Augustinian Christianity with Aristotelianism and its expression in a rehabilitated Thomism.

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<sup>92</sup> Davis RMS p 95.

<sup>93</sup> Davis TPS p.74.

<sup>94</sup> Davis admits that the dramatic nature of his leaving the church thirty years ago, and the radical nature of his criticism may seem strange to today's eyes. This is because many of the more superficial changes that he called for have been implemented over the years. However, he feels that these concessions, such as they are, may have been for the wrong reasons and his underlying criticism of the theology and structure continues unabated. Conversation with Prof. Davis Cambridge February 1995.

Indeed, Aquinas provides MacIntyre with a dramatic illustration of a tradition of rational enquiry which is adequate for resolving the moral problems of modernity. In so doing, he seems to endorse a theological method in philosophical reflection in the public sphere. In this section we shall explore the theological ramifications of this position.

### 1.6.1. MacIntyre and Religion

From the publication of *After Virtue* through to *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, MacIntyre's influence on recent theology has been substantial. From his work it is apparent that MacIntyre is both a realist and, for ease of description, a communitarian.<sup>95</sup> It is further apparent that the only reasonable association of these two positions is a theological one.<sup>96</sup> It is clear from *Three Rival Versions* that MacIntyre is encouraging a rereading of Thomism. David Fergusson<sup>97</sup> suggests that this is a postmodern<sup>98</sup> reading in which the discipline of philosophy is understood as a craft learned through the teaching, discipline and acknowledgement of authority in its quest for goods. To learn the craft the participant must first realise his or her place within the history of the craft, as well as realising their contribution to the future development of the craft. Thus, by using Aquinas's *Summa* as an exemplar, theology and philosophy are understood as crafts at the behest of practical reasoning rather than an exploration of epistemology or metaphysics. This obviously makes his work very appealing for

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<sup>95</sup> Note the caveat introduced in the introduction concerning the use of the adjective communitarian. See note 44 above.

<sup>96</sup> See note 2 in the introduction.

<sup>97</sup> The following comments are indebted to an unpublished conference paper by Prof. David Fergusson of the University of Aberdeen entitled *Theological Reflections on The Philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre*.

<sup>98</sup> It is postmodern, says Fergusson, in the sense that MacIntyre emphasises the role of philosophy as a craft rather than an epistemological project. Ibid p 9.

contemporary theologians. However, as the secondary literature on MacIntyre shows, there are a number of significant criticisms which ought to be taken into account before any theological appropriation of his work can be dealt with.<sup>99</sup> We have already mentioned the problem of authoritarianism, but we can list others: namely, relativism and pragmatism that both undermine MacIntyre's realism; that he eschews any notion of human rights; from a particular theological perspective, although apparently endorsing the theological antecedents of moral philosophy MacIntyre appears singularly reluctant to talk about God.<sup>100</sup> Any one of these topics might generate a thesis in itself.

As we have seen above, MacIntyre's concerns range over three areas. That is to say, first of all, ethical concepts and their position in a socio-historic context. Secondly, his contention that the Enlightenment project is doomed to failure. Thirdly, he is concerned that ethical discourse carried out under the guise of modern liberalism ignores the connection between standards of behaviour and socially embodied practices based on agreement about the goods that accrue from these practices. This characterisation, it seems, vindicates much of what Christian ethicists and theologians have been saying for some time: there is

“... even a new confidence within Christian ethics. After decades of being patronised by Moral philosophy, Christian ethicists have become distinctly more apologetic and polemical. Christian ethicists also express an increasing scepticism about the ability of moral philosophers to be able to resolve dilemmas

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<sup>99</sup> Of particular interest as secondary sources on MacIntyre see the collection by Horton and Mendus (eds.) *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*. 1994. Polity Press Cambridge and McMyler *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity*. 1994 Routledge London.

<sup>100</sup> See Fergusson *Theological reflections on the Philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre* for a more comprehensive listing of these problems.

with universally convincing rational arguments about. In short, the key contentions in *After Virtue* have triumphed.”<sup>101</sup>

Nevertheless, MacIntyre’s triumph is not without its doubters who, like Habermas, attack both his realism and his communitarian position.

### 1.6.2. *The Threads of Hauerwas’s Ecclesial Ethics*

On the other hand, MacIntyre does have his supporters. One such is Stanley Hauerwas. Over the last thirty years perhaps the most polemical, apologetic and energetic pursuit of the task of formulating a distinctive Christian ethic which focuses on narrative in relation to character and the virtues is embodied in the work of Hauerwas. As such he presents an energetic challenge to Christian ethical discourse which relies on natural law to give common ground in the attempt to contribute to the pluralistic public debate on polity and ethics. It is Hauerwas’s avowed intention to stand against liberal faith that seeks to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age. It is his often stated, almost axiomatic claim that the church does not have a social ethic, but rather it is a social ethic.<sup>102</sup> From this we can say that Hauerwas conceives of the church, or community of faith, as a counter-cultural enclave.<sup>103</sup> To this end, Hauerwas responds to the contemporary situation with a constructive programme of ecclesial or church ethics presenting the church as precisely that community which offers the

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<sup>101</sup> Robin Gill “Moral Communities and Christian Ethics.” In *Studies in Christian Ethics* vol. 18, no 1. 1995 pp 1 – 13. Gill has made this point somewhat strongly for the purposes of the rest of his argument in this article. However it sums up quite neatly the overall response to *After Virtue*.

<sup>102</sup> Hauerwas RA p 43, COC p 40, PK p 99, AN p 74, CET p 101.

<sup>103</sup> This is generally the thrust of *Resident Aliens: Life in The Christian Colony*. 1989 Abingdon Nashville (co-authored with William Willimon). In this book Hauerwas argues that the church has a mission of its own. Its task is to be the church or a community of faith with a vision and story which is radically different and which, in turn, tends to a different way of life.

necessary context for coherent ethical discourse. Thus, he envisages the church as a community of faith that attempts to integrate Christology and social ethics, breaking down the dichotomy of agent and act and imbuing social ethics with virtues of self-discovery.<sup>104</sup> Hauerwas further asserts that *Christian Ethics* is a direct challenge to the theories of autonomy upon which liberal theories like those of Davis and Habermas are based.

Against a social background of fragmentation and moral disorder, Hauerwas proposes that the "... intelligibility and truthfulness of Christian convictions reside in their practical force."<sup>105</sup> Thus theology is a practical activity whereby we attempt to understand and explicate the way in which Christian convictions construe reality.<sup>106</sup> Christian ethics, then, offers the means of reaching a true understanding of ourselves, and our existence.<sup>107</sup> The practical import of Hauerwas's theology is always orientated towards the church insofar as understanding ourselves and our existence leads to helping the church do what it does better.<sup>108</sup> As such, theology is rooted in the practices that constitutes the church.<sup>109</sup> For Hauerwas there is little distinction between ethics and theology, in fact the task of Christian ethics is "... the task of theology itself – namely to help the churches share their story truthfully."<sup>110</sup> In this sentence we see displayed the essence of Hauerwas's programme. That is to say, he insists on the exclusivity and separateness of the church from the world and the necessity of acknowledging that

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<sup>104</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas ACC pp91.

<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas COC p 1.

<sup>106</sup> Hauerwas TT p 9.

<sup>107</sup> Hauerwas COC p 90.

<sup>108</sup> Hauerwas CET p 123, RA p 97.

<sup>109</sup> Hauerwas *Why Resident Aliens Struck a Chord* p 420ff.

<sup>110</sup> Hauerwas CET p 125.



all that is good comes to us not as a right but as a gift mediated through the narrative community of faith that is the church.<sup>111</sup> This truthful church, he claims, is faithful to the scriptures and shapes truthful disciples. In so doing the church imparts its message to the social order. This is a direct counter to liberal Christians who, for too long "... have presented their faith ... as a survival tactic for the modern world: the church primarily has been seen as something of extrinsic functional value to the culture - helping Caesar keep society in good working order."<sup>112</sup> The nature of theology for Hauerwas, then, is practical while its task is to help the church to be the church.

Following on from this, one point that is worth making is that although it has been suggested that Hauerwas is a narrative theologian we should be wary of categorising him as such.<sup>113</sup> While acknowledging the significance of narrative Hauerwas says that it is a mistake to assume that this is the central focus of his position. For Hauerwas, "[n]arrative is but a concept that helps clarify the interrelation between the various themes I have sought to develop in the attempt to give a constructive account of the moral life."<sup>114</sup> In fact, he tried to avoid the use of the term precisely because of the manner in which it could be misconstrued. Nevertheless, it was necessary for him to employ the term in order to explicate coherently his idea of character. As such, narrative is a tool that serves to explicate

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<sup>111</sup> Hauerwas PK.

<sup>112</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon *The Christian Century* January 30th 1985 101 no. pp 98ff.

<sup>113</sup> Paul Nelson, for instance, suggests that Hauerwas is the most significant exponent of narrative among contemporary Christian ethicists." *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry*. 1987 Pennsylvania State University Press. University Park, London. p 109.

<sup>114</sup> Hauerwas PK p xxv.



the politics of discipleship which are always pre-eminent in Hauerwas's thought.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, the church is always in the foreground and the language of narrative in the background.<sup>116</sup> Hence, we do Hauerwas most justice if we understand him as an ecclesial ethicist who makes use of narrative rather than as a narrative theologian.<sup>117</sup>

## 1.7. Concluding Summary

In this chapter I have charted a course from a description of modernity as the age of critical reason, through Habermas and MacIntyre's respective, critical responses to modernity. Finally we introduced the threads of Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. By exploring their philosophical antecedents, a foundation has been laid for the detailed, critical exposition of Davis and Hauerwas that is to follow.

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<sup>115</sup> Fergusson. "Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 50 no2 1997 pp 242 – 249. Fergusson suggests that while Hauerwas's "... stress upon the distinctiveness of the Christian community and its narrative ... We should not underestimate the extent to which Hauerwas is calling for a distinctive church." In this light it is the politics of the church that concerns Hauerwas more than narrative.

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Hauerwas US p 18 n 5, or CET 54 – 62. A common misapprehension of Hauerwas's work suggests that he is a narrative theologian (see Thiemann *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* 1985 University of Notre Dame Press. Indiana and Paul Nelson *Narrative and Morality*). This misapprehension comes from a dichotomy between the narrative form of scripture and the narrative form of experience and the attendant question as to which should have priority. As will become clear from our exposition in Chapters 4 and 5, Hauerwas maintains no such distinction. The relationship between the practice of rendering the character of God and witnessing to the kingdom, the community that embodies such activity and the scriptures are only coherent, and therefore intelligible in the ecclesial context. Such an understanding resolves the dichotomy. I would prefer, therefore, to understand Hauerwas as an ecclesial ethicist/theologian who employs narrative.

<sup>117</sup> Hauerwas also describes himself latterly as methodologically a journalist in DFTF p 9 where he says "What I do is not quite theology not quite ethics, not quite cultural criticism. Yet in the spaces created by the 'not quite' I hope to entice the reader to enter a world that will change his or her life." Although relating to this collection of essays in particular, this provides an interesting description of what Hauerwas actually is an exponent of.

In the course of this investigation I have noted that Habermas and MacIntyre shared similar concerns in their responses to modernity. Both acknowledge that the advent of the Enlightenment was not simply a matter of disenchantment with pre-modern world-views. Rather, it arose either from an imbalanced development of rationality, where instrumental reason held sway over communicative reason, or a misinterpretation of Aquinas's efforts to combine Christian theology with Aristotelian philosophy. Both trace a narrative of modernity that pick up the insights of Hegel, Nietzsche and Weber. It is the spectre of negativity and naïve realism unleashed by this narrative of subjectivity, autonomy and causality that both Habermas and MacIntyre try to counter. In their respective responses Habermas and MacIntyre represented two sides of a debate that might be characterised as a choice between reason and tradition. As such we saw that they raised questions about the place of religion, theology and the church.

We can now see that Davis and Hauerwas present in the same fashion. Davis, picking up on Habermas's insights, generates what he calls critical theology that engages in the process of emancipatory reflection on the life of praxis. This theology allies the transformative element in Christian faith to the transformative element in communicative action. The nature of critical theology, then, is practical and its task is to recreate society in light of the transformative principle of faith. Similarly Hauerwas, picking up on MacIntyre's insights regarding tradition-dependent ethical discourse, generates an ecclesial theology to stand against liberal polity and liberal Christian faith. As such, the church is not to have a social ethic

but to be a social ethic. The church, then, imparts its message to the social order through its witness to the peaceable kingdom. For Hauerwas, too, the nature of theology is practical while its task is to generate a different way of life that is a witness to a different story. This agenda, therefore, places Hauerwas on the opposite pole from Davis. We shall see in the following chapters, however, that very similar themes and concerns provide an impetus for, and arise from, their theologies. In the next two chapters we shall engage in a detailed exposition of Davis's critical theology, unpacking some of the ideas raised in an introductory fashion here. In chapters 4 and 5 we shall engage in a similarly detailed exposition of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.

Charles Davis's Critical Theology and Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesial Ethics:  
Discourse and Character and the Church's Political Action

## Section 2

Charles Davis and The Promise of Critical Theology

## Chapter 2. Charles Davis's Post-orthodox Critical Theology

In the previous chapter we examined the response of Jürgen Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre to modernity which was characterised as the age of critical reason. Having traced these responses, we found that the choice they presented between procedural communicative rationality and substantive tradition-based rationality in moral discourse raised several theological issues along the way. This in turn allowed us to introduce Charles Davis's critical theology and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. In this chapter we embark on a closer examination of Davis's critical theology by focusing on his post-orthodoxy. This refers to his notion that religious identity, properly understood, is not to be tied to the norms or contents of any one religious tradition.<sup>1</sup>

To this end this chapter will follow several stages. First of all we shall begin by outlining the particular way in which Davis has read Habermas. I shaped the foregoing exposition of Habermas's work bearing in mind issues that are pertinent to Davis's theological and ecclesiological concerns. What I intend to do here,

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<sup>1</sup> We will be using the term post-orthodox for two reasons, while admitting its provisional nature as a description. First of all it is a description that has gained some currency since Marc P Lalonde published a short paper entitled "From postmodernity to post-orthodoxy, or Charles Davis and the contemporary context of Christian theology." *Studies in Religion* 22/4 (1993): pp 437 – 449. Secondly, it situates his work in the present theological context, to the extent that it reflects his creative disaffiliation from the juridical-hierarchical ecclesia. Nevertheless we acknowledge that such an epithet can never do justice to the extent and vitality of Davis's vision. It is the purpose of the next two chapters to explore that vision.

however, is to show and explore in more depth the particular themes that Davis picked up and developed from Habermas and, more importantly, to show where his theological agenda causes him to have differences with Habermas.

Secondly, in this chapter I shall develop the theme of Davis's post-orthodoxy. This development will focus on his understanding of theory, practice and rationality in theological discourse and finally pick up the matter of the role of tradition in generating discursive norms and identity. This investigation of Davis's post-orthodoxy will provide a platform from which we can move on, in the next chapter, to examine the implications of his post-orthodoxy for Christian ethics, revisiting the question of identity this time in the light of political action and the religious understanding of the interior self. Finally, we shall develop these themes further with reference to their implications for the church and the type of community of faith that results.

## 2.1. Charles Davis's Reading of Jürgen Habermas

Davis's explorations of the Habermasian form of critical theory, as we have already noted, are steps on the way in his search for a contemporary religious identity. Davis claims that a "...post-conventional, universalistic religious identity, both personal and social, not tied to the fixed contents and norms of any one tradition nor to any permanent collective body, alone corresponds to the present level of human social development."<sup>2</sup> His key assertion is that the idea of practice in critical theory, as he understands it, is incompatible with any form of religious

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<sup>2</sup> Davis RMS p 152.

orthodoxy. This assertion is derived from Davis's life-long concern with making theology practical. That is to say, he is concerned with the relation between:

“... religion and society. ... [and] examining the thesis that society is the product of human agency. That thesis is characteristic of the modern period. Hence it immediately raises the question of the meaning of modernity and the function of religion within the modern context. ...

Religion is a form of social practice. It is therefore affected by the manner in which society is conceived and organized.”<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind, Davis shares an insight with political and liberation theologians that the interpretative nature of Christianity, as well as its interpretation, is mediated through actual social and political reality.<sup>4</sup> Where he differs from political and liberation theologians is in his insistence that this mediation has to become a critical, dialectical mediation, constantly deconstructing and reconstructing the implications of its own practice in light of the manner in which society is conceived and organised. This has the effect of transforming the theoretical self-understanding of the Christian tradition. Thus orthodoxy which, according to Davis, predetermines the limits of praxis in ever-new situations, is incompatible with authentic Christian practice. This insight brings us into the critical public discourse on ethics at a level that gives primacy to praxis.

Giving such primacy to praxis reflects two things. First of all, it reflects Davis's, basically liberal agenda.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, however, it reflects Davis's two-fold insight that human culture, in its many forms, is the product of human activity

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<sup>3</sup> Davis RMS pp 1 – 2.

<sup>4</sup> Davis WLWD p 2.

<sup>5</sup> The word liberal here simply differentiates Davis from the communitarians. Later in the chapter we shall refine this distinction in terms of Davis's own concerns about the inadequacy of so called liberal theology.

and that religion too is a form of social practice.<sup>6</sup> Davis, therefore, understands contemporary society to be defined as modern insofar as it is a "...society or people that has not committed itself as a collectivity to a single set of ultimate beliefs and values. It is pluralist in the sense that it embraces people who differ in regard to their adherence to ultimate beliefs and values."<sup>7</sup> He contrasts this with pre-modern society, which he suggests presented an undifferentiated whole wherein the religious institution, or church was squarely equated with society. There are two qualifying points to note here. First, although Davis wants to understand society as an artefact and subject to formal procedural forms of reason, he does not want to, nor can he, play down the role of virtue or substantive reason in the development from pre-modern to modern.<sup>8</sup> The second point to note is that secularisation means that, after the dawn of the Enlightenment, theology is carried on extrinsically to the social order. The realisation that this precipitates is that theology has always been a form social practice, once central but now peripheral to a broader social understanding of human social action. This means that contemporary theology can, in no way, be seen as a structural principle of society, neither should it attempt to be. It is Davis's argument that, if theology is to realise its nature and fulfil its task, it must enter into a reciprocal relationship with the culture in which it finds itself.<sup>9</sup> It is from this position that Davis turns to Habermas for a more full account of the causes and consequences of modernity.

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<sup>6</sup> Davis RMS p 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p 2.

<sup>8</sup> Davis notes an historical paradox whereby the duality of church and state, the first useful index of secularisation, was the result of the papal victory in the investiture controversy of the eleventh and the first part of the twelfth century. The investiture controversy saw the church object to the temporal power of the lay feudal lords. The controversy was settled in principle at the Diet of Worms in 1122, but it nevertheless precipitated the ongoing struggle between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. Significantly, for Davis, it marked the disjunction between temporal and spiritual authority and, therefore, the first crack in the edifice of totalising Christendom and the substantive rationality that supported it.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Davis "Theology for Tomorrow" Chapter 1 of TPCT pp. 23 - 31.



2.1.1. *Davis's debt to the Habermasian Account of Critical Social Theory*

As we have observed in the previous chapter, Jürgen Habermas demonstrates a profound interest in the formation of public will, the relation between state and society and a belief in practical reasoning. He stresses the role of intersubjective understanding and the significance of universal norms and values within the methodology of the social sciences and humanities. Moreover, he shows that norms and values are subject to procedures of rational inquiry and consensus. That consensus is subject to compromise by distorted communication that arises because of the one-sided development of instrumental reason and strategic action. The procedures of rational enquiry can be realigned to include communicative rationality and non-distorted communicative action. His extensive interests cover many areas: sociology, social theory, linguistics, philosophy, ethics and public policy. His impact on theology generally, though extensive, is more difficult to estimate. In the case of Davis, however, the debts are clear and present. To construe theology as critical theology, Davis must attempt to relate theology to the modern tradition of critique. In this task Davis looks to Habermas to understand the development of modernity, the structure of discourse and the general norms of discourse, which arise from this understanding.

A key point of attraction to Habermas's thought for Davis is that Habermas sees the task of philosophy as be transformative. Since faith also operates, for Davis, as a transformative principle, then theology and philosophy, as means of understanding the ethical ramifications of the world in which we live, cannot be mutually exclusive categories of inquiry. Indeed, as Davis sees them, both share an overwhelming concern for justice to the extent that the world is neither as it could be nor should be. To realise justice, then, requires a change of a

revolutionary nature.<sup>10</sup> This revolution is brought about, in Habermas's thought, through his inheritance of the tradition of critical theory.

The term 'critical theory', as we have observed, refers to the theory of subject, society, history and religion, promoted by the likes of Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin in the Frankfurt School of Social Research.<sup>11</sup> Habermas's analysis of modernity from this perspective, which we have introduced above, is highly critical yet sympathetic. The problems of modernity, as he sees them, will be answered most effectively by taking seriously the implications of some strains of the Enlightenment project. Habermas recognised that distorted communication, brought about by domination, is the essential problem of modernity. It follows, then, that only undistorted communication can remedy the problem.<sup>12</sup> Distorted communication arises from a corruption of rationality, a one sided development of rationality, instrumental at the expense of communicative. This unleashes an invasion, or colonisation of the lifeworld, by the system: that is to say colonisation by bureaucratised, instrumental rationality. The result of this process is a destructive domination of the lifeworld by the system. The only solution, for Habermas, is further rationalisation but this time in defence of the lifeworld. This can only come about in the redeeming of practical reason.<sup>13</sup> The need for a rational defence of the lifeworld arises from the

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<sup>10</sup> See Thomas McCarthy in the Introduction to Jürgen Habermas CES "... it was a characteristic tenet of the early Frankfurt School that basic psychological concepts had to be integrated with basic socio-economic concepts because the perspectives of an autonomous ego and an emancipated society were essentially interdependent." (p ix) This quote indicates Habermas's appropriation of the main concerns of the Frankfurt School.

<sup>11</sup> See Münch *Sociological Theory* vols. 2 and 3. In particular vol. 2 subtitled Development Since the 1960's explores the impact of critical theory on sociology. See also Benhabib and Dallmayr (eds.) *The Communicative Ethics Controversy*. p 296.

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy Intro to CES.

<sup>13</sup> Habermas TCA vols. 1&2 and PDM deal with working out of this claim. See in particular PDM pp 336 – 365.

recognition that, no matter how lopsided, the process of rationalisation, understood as a basic dynamic of history, is irreversible, so "... [I]n the development from myth, through religion to philosophy and ideology, the demand for discursive redemption of normative validity claims increasingly prevails."<sup>14</sup> Davis became intrigued by the appropriation of ostensibly theological terms such as redemption and transformation and Habermas's concern with justice. While agreeing with the substance of Habermas's criticisms of modernity and suspicious of privatised, bourgeois Christianity, Davis felt that Habermas's denial of the public validity of theology posed a direct challenge to his own perceived theological vocation of "... giving voice to the word of God in the language and context of modernity."<sup>15</sup> The response to this challenge is a theology that is "...engaged in the process of emancipatory reflection, sharing in that way the project of the Enlightenment."<sup>16</sup>

For Davis, as we have noted, theology is tied to faith and not to belief. From the dynamics of this relationship, gleaned through the insights of critical theology, he attempts to construct a valid, practical ecclesiology to counter the "inadequate model of Christian community..."<sup>17</sup> encountered in the church and the

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<sup>14</sup> Habermas LC p 11.

<sup>15</sup> Davis "Theology for Tomorrow." TPCT p 24. The story of Davis's first encounter with Habermas's work, relayed to me in a personal conversation, betrays a certain serendipity. He was in Holland visiting the Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx. Schillebeeckx had a habit of sleeping during the day and working through the night. This meant that Davis was left to his own devices for most of the day and spent much of his time in the Dominican library. By chance he happened to pick up a Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis*. Since then he has been engaged in a self-critical examination of his own thinking as a Christian. Personal conversation, with Prof. Davis Edinburgh January 1996. TPCT p 24.

<sup>16</sup> TPCT p 24. Other attempts have been made to appropriate Habermas's work into a theological programme. Most notably, perhaps, is Helmut Peukert's *Science, Action and Fundamental Theology: Toward a Theology of Communicative Action*. 1986 MIT Press Cambridge MA. See also, Rudolph J. Siebert *The critical theory of Religion, The Frankfurt School: From Universal Pragmatic to Political Theology*. 1985. Mouton. Berlin & New York.

<sup>17</sup> Davis TPS p 74.

preisthood that he left.<sup>18</sup> In this light, critical theology is defined, while acknowledging its debt to the Habermasian form of critical theory, as theology that engages in the process of emancipatory reflection. Critical theology directs emancipatory reflection at the life of Christian praxis that exists in a reciprocal relationship to the culture that shapes it.

### 2.1.2. *Davis's Differences with Habermas*

While acknowledging the debt critical theology owes to critical theory, we must also note the points of difference. The first and most obvious difference is that, while broadly agreeing with Habermas's critical philosophical assessment of modernity, Davis continues to do theology. This agenda is dependent upon, and shares a vision with, Habermas's notions of communicative action and rationality. As such it gives primacy to praxis over theory because it is through the shared conversation, as action, that we reach understanding since communicative action serves the ends of justice and emancipation. However, Davis wishes to place critical theology firmly in the public sphere. In other words Davis is calling for the critical theologian to take a position that is a practical way of life. Such a way of life will radicalise both the form and content of theology. Its radical nature will be radical only in as much as this way of life is both self-critical and self-aware in relation to the tradition whence he or she has come. Hence the

“...cognitive contribution of Christianity to social, cultural, and political life is to be found in providing the transcendent foundation needed for sustained communication among human beings, despite their differences and conflicts. The transcendent horizon within which Christian Faith places human life, the unrestricted openness to reality it calls for and, though yet imperfectly, creates, the self transcendence

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<sup>18</sup> Davis prefers to use the phrase creative disaffiliation rather than leaving. Creative disaffiliation describes more positively the move he made away from the juridical hierarchical church towards a mystical pragmatic model of Christianity. We shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter 6, in the meantime see Davis QC pp 236 – 239.

of Christian love, the dignity of each individual resulting from the relation of each person to God, the universal community Christian faith intends and discerns as transcending all social distinctions and indeed the boundary of death itself so that it includes past victims as well as present liberators: all this provides a basis and context within which human beings can meet together in authentic conversation ... to tackle the problems of human existence through a common understanding and common action, unhindered by fixed immovable barriers.”

This lengthy quote serves to illustrate precisely what Davis anticipates as the concrete result of critical theology, while pointing out the principal reason for his differences with Habermas, that is the transcendent horizon that Christianity recognises and Habermas does not. Possibly the most significant difference between Davis and Habermas, then, is Davis's return to the supernatural in an attempt to provide a basic context for the successful operation of communicative reason and discourse ethics.<sup>20</sup>

In the last chapter of *Religion and the Making of Society*, Davis “...returns to the question of the necessity of the supernatural...”<sup>21</sup> to deal with what is perceived to be a lack in Habermas's overall schema. This lack pertains to “...the aporia created for communicative rationality by the destruction of communication by

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<sup>19</sup> Davis WLWD p 122.

<sup>20</sup> Davis maintains that, in theology since the High Middle Ages, the word supernatural refers not to beings but to grace that elevates human beings to participate in the divine life: “God offers human beings a destiny that lies beyond the potentiality of human nature as such. It is a free gift from God. It opens for human beings a destiny that lies beyond anything that could be regarded as demanded as proportionate to the exigencies, not only of human beings but of any finite creatures.” (Davis RMS p 9) In this passage two things become plain, the first is exactly what Davis means by the ‘necessity of the supernatural’. We have already mentioned this in Chapter 3, and we shall come back to it in the next section when we examine a practical application of critical theology and ecclesial ethics, but it is worth reiterating that Davis is not referring to a being when he invokes the supernatural Davis (WLWD pp 85 – 94).

<sup>21</sup> Davis RMS p 18 & 188ff.

death.”<sup>22</sup> To compensate for this aporetic moment Davis responds with an investigation of hope. He says:

“... is reason, even communicative reason, enough for hope? Reason must find its motivation in an attitude of hope. But does not hope to justify itself require anchoring in reason?”<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between hope and reason is explored within the context of Habermas's theory of communicative action. Davis conceives of hope as “... a multi-dimensional attitude, consisting (1) in an enduring disposition of the will to confront the future with confidence despite the negativities of human existence, having (2) an emotional and bodily counterpart and (3) demanding two affirmations at its cognitive core, namely, the affirmation of the objective possibility and the affirmation of the future actuality of a fulfilled human life.”<sup>24</sup> He has to ask, however, if hope thus understood is rational.

To answer that question, Davis embraces the insights of Habermas's widening of the concept of reason away from an instrumental to a communicative understanding. Communicative reason, underpinning action orientated towards understanding, describes for Davis the boundaries of hope as generally understood. For the theologian, however, it offers an opportunity to re-examine “... the rational underpinning of the distinctively religious attitudes... ” of faith, hope and charity.<sup>25</sup> This suggests to Davis that the traditional theological endeavour of relating faith, hope and charity to reason and its demands is not yet to be forsaken.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Davis is not the only person to note this aporetic moment in Habermas's project. See, for example Helmut Peukert “Enlightenment and Theology as Unfinished Projects” in Browning and Fiorenza op cit., and Rudolf Siebert *The Critical Theory of Religion, The Frankfurt School: From Universal Pragmatic to Political Theology*. 1985. Mouton. Berlin & New York. We shall return to discuss this matter in more depth in Chapter 7.

<sup>23</sup> Davis RMS p 190.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid p 192.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid p 198.



At this point Davis identifies the significance of distinctively religious attitudes to hope. Religious hope, he claims, is total hope which is "... not content to affirm the possibility and future actuality of a destiny proportionate to human beings..." as finite, fallible, temporal creatures.<sup>26</sup> Rather it recognises in the depth of human existence a relationship to "... a transcendent source or power."<sup>27</sup> It is this relationship that informs the interior self, that is itself the basis of authentic Christian political action. We shall return to a discussion of the interior self later in this chapter. The relationship that religious hope uncovers also makes sense of the distinction that Davis draws between faith and belief..

Davis's theology draws our attention to faith and its relationship to belief. To reiterate our earlier comments, this is no light distinction since "... [t]he absoluteness of faith is the absoluteness of total demand and total response in an experience of unrestricted love in relation to hidden transcendence or mystery ... that absoluteness should not be confused with certitude and beliefs."<sup>28</sup> As we pointed out earlier this suggests that faith rests on a mystical moment. Hence to this extent faith can be equated with the human response to hidden transcendence that is intimated by the aporetic moment in communicative action. Davis, in referring to the aporetic moment can suggest, therefore, that to succeed communicative action points beyond itself, but not necessarily to anything that must be called anything. The content of faith, because it rests on a mystical moment, is constantly open to revision in the light of new experience. In this sense it is critical and, in Habermas's terms, reflexive. Belief, which is not the same as faith, falls into the category of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy presumes that 'knowledge'

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid pp 198 – 202.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p 202.

<sup>28</sup> Davis WLWD p 67.

is foundational for religious faith. Thus, to reiterate, insofar as Davis understands faith to have priority over belief he rejects fideism and is able to claim that Christian Faith is a transformative principle, not a body of objective knowledge.<sup>29</sup> Thus construed, Christian faith leads directly to Christian practice, a practical way of life.<sup>30</sup> Christian practice is response to the reality of a transcendent gift or revelation. So, despite any Marxist notion of the primacy of practice that Davis might harbour, there is also a particular religious reason for affirming the primacy of praxis.

Given the primacy of praxis, the task of theology now must be understood as recreation of society in light of a transformative faith through the principles of communicative action rather than the strategic deployment of orthodoxy. The cognitive contribution of Christianity to the social political and cultural life that this entails "... is to provide the transcendent foundation needed for sustained communication among human beings, despite their differences and conflicts."<sup>31</sup> Hence it can be observed that Davis, in aligning himself with Habermas's constructive programme has provided the starting point for a development of a reconstructed and reconstructive theology which is orientated towards facilitating a reconstruction of society within a theological horizon that compensates for the aporetic moment in communicative action. In effect, critical theology might provide the "... basis and context within which human beings can meet together in authentic conversation."<sup>32</sup> More precisely, since critical theology, like any theology

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29 Ibid. p 78.

30 Davis RMS p 95.

31 Davis WLWD p 122.

32 Ibid "What I am calling a process of communication corresponds to the 'authentic conversation' of David Tracy. ... It is likewise the 'conversation' that Richard Rorty designates as the 'ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood,' in contrast to an epistemology-centred philosophy. In relation to the plurality of religion it is what Wilfred Cantwell Smith calls 'colloquy'



both reflects and shapes the community from which it comes, I would contend that in making such a provision critical theology makes demands on the church. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, we shall go on to examine in more depth the substance of Davis's critical theology and its claims in an attempt to prepare the ground for an investigation of the impact of such claims on Christian ethics and then on the church.

## 2.2. Charles Davis's Post-orthodoxy

As I noted previously, Davis's critical theology might best be described as post-orthodox. By this I mean that, given his eschewal of orthodoxy in favour of faith as a transformative principle, we are led into a theology that resists the limits of any one denomination or even religious tradition. This position reflects Davis's concern with motivating and sustaining effective social and political action, both within and outwith the church. At the heart of this concern lies the relationship between faith and social practice. In this section we shall explore in more depth the exact dimensions of Davis's post-orthodoxy by highlighting three dominant themes. That is to say we shall, first of all, explore Davis's understanding of the relationship of theory to praxis. Secondly, we shall determine Davis's understanding of the role and limits of rationality in theological discourse. Thirdly, we shall relate this to the role of tradition in generating discursive norms and identity. While none of these themes are independent of each other, and are in fact interdependent, I shall distinguish between them for the purpose of analysis. This analysis will allow us to appreciate more fully the relationship between each of them and ultimately the relationship between faith and social practice.

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'colloquy' in order to suggest a side-by-side confronting of humanity's problems rather than a face-to-face confronting of one another."

### 2.2.1. Theory and Praxis

A primary theme in Davis's work is the relation of faith to praxis, or practice.<sup>33</sup> This raises immediately the question of theory and practice and their proper relationship. As we have noted, it is not enough for him to restrict this notion of praxis to what might, in other circumstances, be called religious praxis. His concern is with a broader conception of social practice in general. He says quite explicitly that:

"By praxis ... I mean the embodied activities of socially related men and women, whereby they struggle with nature as a reality independent of consciousness, and with the sedimented objectified products of past human action in order to shape this world and themselves."<sup>34</sup>

Davis is calling here for a sharp distinction between, and certainly a subordination of, what he calls "metaphysico-theological syntheses"<sup>35</sup> in favour of a praxis-based scheme. This assertion is analogous to Habermas's move to a post-metaphysical philosophical position. By creating a distinction between these syntheses and praxis-based theology I take Davis to mean a subordination of theologies bound to orthodoxy and a consequent distinction between the mystical-pragmatic and the mythical visionary-models of Christianity.<sup>36</sup> In mythical-visionary theology myth

<sup>33</sup> Davis TPS pp 80 – 97.

<sup>34</sup> Davis WLWD p 69.

<sup>35</sup> Davis WLWD p 68.

<sup>36</sup> These distinctions will be explored in more depth at the end of Chapter 3. For the moment we should note that this statement represents Davis's disenchantment with what he calls the dominant Mythical model of the Christian religion. In the meantime we should note that these models represent what Davis identifies as the four types of the Christian religion:

<i>Type of Christian Religion</i>	Mythical: Total order as normative	Pragmatic: Practical way of life	Visionary: New world in contrast to the old	Mystical: Unmediated experience of the absolute
<i>Basic trope</i>	Metaphor: Representational	Metonymy: reductionist	Synechdoche: Integrative	Irony: Negational
<i>Sense of Scripture</i>	Literal Or historical	Tropological or moral	Allegorical	Anagogical or mystical

functions as the ultimate impetus behind social structure and functions, hence the totalising, undifferentiated shape of pre-modern society. In such a society it is very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of that society as a human construct, rather than something given by grace prior to human activity.<sup>37</sup> Inevitably, to sustain such undifferentiated wholeness, myth had to be translated into propositional beliefs and thence imposed as dogmas. This, Davis contends, generates a structure that the myth itself cannot sustain. In the end this destroys the mystical moment intrinsic to faith.<sup>38</sup> An example, for Davis, of a well-intentioned but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to overcome some of the problems faced by theology and to provide a feasible theological response is to be found in the work of the theologian Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan, says Davis, “..attempts to transcribe the Christian myth into a metaphysical conceptuality.”<sup>39</sup> As such Lonergan engages in what Davis disparagingly refers to as ontotheology. He considers that Lonergan’s ontotheological efforts exaggerate the function of detached, discursive rationality and remains an incurable dogmatist. That is to say he seeks and claims:

“... unrevisable certainties... Among the values faith discerns, he [Lonergan] argues, is the value of believing. Hence by faith one enters into the religious

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<i>Ideological implication</i>	Conservatism: Prior order as normative	Liberalism: A plurality of pragmatic orders	Radicalism: New order to be created	Anarchism: No order outside the individual.
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We should also mention the four strands of political action associated with each type. That is to say Sacrament, ritual and moral action in this world, passive expectation/revolutionary action and withdrawal from action into passive contemplation. Clearly, Davis embraces a mystical-pragmatic model and is disenchanted with the mythical-visionary model of the church, which he sees as historically dominant. Nevertheless he sees it as his task to engender an ethos wherein the two types can engage in productive discourse rather than liberal-conservative deadlock. WLWD particularly Chapter 11 pp 107 – 123.

<sup>37</sup> Davis RMS p 2.

<sup>38</sup> Davis WLWD p 68.

<sup>39</sup> See Davis TPS pp 169 – 170; WLWD pp 60 - 70, 76, 113; RMS pp 153, 154, 169. Ultimately, Lonergan gives priority to cognitional theory over metaphysics and attempts to find “... in consciousness the data for an invariant basis of human knowledge and for an unrevisable cognitional theory...” nevertheless, according to Davis he has not provided a secure basis for the restoration of traditional metaphysics and, hence, Catholic ontotheology.

community as a community of belief, which is a higher collaboration of men and women in disseminating the judgements of fact and the judgements of value proposed for their acceptance by the word of religion...[this] brings him back to the familiar Catholic dogmas."<sup>40</sup>

The results of this theological failure are, to say the least, problematic for praxis. Davis notes that the result is that praxis becomes "...the sublation of the cognitional process by deliberation, evaluation, decision and action, and it effects a discernment between the products, including cognitional products, of human authenticity and the products of human inauthenticity."<sup>41</sup> This does not do justice to the social and political breadth and complexity of praxis as defined by Davis above and as understood by critical theory. Notably, Davis contends that such a theological understanding of praxis depends on, and offers, a philosophy of consciousness "...in which the inner events or states of consciousness are always the independent variable, of which everything else in human living and history is a function."<sup>42</sup> This unease mirrors Habermas's unease with philosophies of consciousness and his consequent move beyond metaphysics.<sup>43</sup>

Another honourable, but ultimately unsuccessful endeavour to deal with the problematic relationship of theory and praxis comes, for Davis, in the shape of so-called 'political theology'. In contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrinal traditions, and by implication all other doctrinal traditions, political theology marks an attempt to reverse the privilege of theory over praxis and undermine its claims to permanence and universality. Hence it is not ontotheological in its

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<sup>40</sup> Davis WLWD p 70.

<sup>41</sup> Davis WLWD p 70.

<sup>42</sup> Davis WLWD p 70.

<sup>43</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

orientation. Insofar as political theology at least attempts to maintain the primacy of praxis over theory it suggests an affirmation that religious faith, even Christian religious faith, is always mediated through a cultural element. Davis notes, however, that this significant claim is not matched by a rigour of execution.<sup>44</sup> In the final analysis the political and liberation theologians, in the same manner as Lonergan, end up merely reiterating traditional, albeit neglected, dogma that is immune to the radical self-criticism necessary for authentic praxis. Hence, for Davis, even an honourable attempt, such as that of the political or liberation theologians, cannot return the relationship of theory and practice, distorted in theological orthodoxy, to equilibrium. We are forced, therefore, to consider seriously his claim that a proper understanding of praxis should turn us away from theological orthodoxy towards faith while a proper understanding of faith precipitates a practical way of life.

It should be noted, however, that it has been suggested of Davis, that he too is promoting little more than a traditional Catholic ontotheology. For example, John Milbank "... Davis upholds a similarly modernist element of onto-theology: the ascent to God must be mediated by a transition from particular to universal discourse. ... [m]odern onto-theological metaphysics (founded in autonomous immanent reason and still deployed by Davis)."<sup>45</sup> However, to make this suggestion is clearly to have misunderstood what Davis is about. Ontotheology "...is the attempt to translate the content of the Christian myth into the theoretical concepts and statements of metaphysical philosophy."<sup>46</sup> As such there

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<sup>44</sup> Davis TPS pp 1-26. Davis notes in WLWD Chapter 4 pp 35 – 45 that, while liberation theology is an example of what he calls the Pragmatic model of the Christian religion, it also displays the qualities of the visionary and thus ends up distorted.

<sup>45</sup> John Milbank commenting on Davis's RMS *Theology* vol. 98 1995, pp 320 – 322.

<sup>46</sup> Davis WLWD pp 60 – 61.

are three problems with ontotheology from Davis's point of view. The first problem is its intellectualism. As is apparent from his criticism of Lonergan, Davis considers that ontotheology makes knowledge foundational, this is equivalent to giving privilege to theory over practice.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, it assumes the possibility of abstracting literal meaning from religious symbols. However, as Davis points out, the possession of meaning by religious symbols does not imply that their meaning is readily translatable into the concepts of metaphysical discourse.<sup>48</sup> The third problem is that ontotheology actually obscures and finally kills the Christian myth in favour of "... pseudocertainty and precision. ... Once myth has been strangled by excessive speculation, there is no ready means of reviving it."<sup>49</sup>

Davis is well aware of these problems and is, therefore, unlikely to commit himself to such an approach. Indeed, he says that "...[a] worldview, bringing to bear all the resources of reason upon the data of faith to form a comprehensive synthetic account of reality, the world and the human situation is at best a possible cultural consequence of Christian faith, ... It should never however be identified with the Christian faith."<sup>50</sup> It is Davis's suggestion that this identification is exactly what happened to the mythical model of the Christian religion. In the end Davis's post-orthodoxy, focusing as it does on faith rather than dogma, means that he must embrace the potent images and stories of myth rather than watered down metaphysical theology.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, Davis accepts that the reign of metaphysics has come to an end, and aligns himself with Habermas's post-metaphysical position.

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<sup>47</sup> Davis Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Davis Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Davis Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Davis WLWD p 71.

<sup>51</sup> Davis WLWD p 61. "If one looks at the catechisms, the books of instruction, and sermons from before the recent biblical and liturgical revivals, one will see that what they give is watered-down metaphysical theology, not the potent images and stories of a myth. The technical concepts of ontotheology had slowly worked their way down into popular religion."



Consequently, it is highly unlikely that one could make and sustain a case to suggest that Davis is engaged in ontotheology, except perhaps to the extent that he still wants to relate Christian faith, hope and love to reason and its demands: that is, post-metaphysical, communicative reason.

Returning to the theme of Davis's understanding of the proper relationship between theory and practice. Davis says, in *Theology and Political Society*, that Habermas's work has done much to clarify:

"... the relation between theory and practice. [And] Some of the distinctions he makes are helpful, I think, in relating Christian Faith to political policy and action."<sup>52</sup>

It comes as no surprise, then, to find that Davis's understanding of praxis is extremely similar to that which Habermas calls *lebenspraxis* or, more simply, living or the habit of living. In his constant search to justify and motivate effective social and political action and re-establish the correct relationship between theory and praxis, Davis laments what he calls the 'political misery' of present day theology. By this I take him to mean, precisely, the paucity of the relevance of the Christian faith to the habit of living as well as the vain attempts of the Christian ethicist and theologian to give theoretical voice to motivate such activity in this sphere. He goes on to say:

"The political misery of present-day theology comes from the fact that, ever since theology has been unwilling to serve as a mere legitimation of ecclesiastical authority, it has become devoid of any positive significance on the political level."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Davis TPS p 69.

<sup>53</sup> Davis TPS p 60.

Thus, as the social move from pre-modern to modern has resulted in the disassociation of church and state there has been a decline in the perceived relevancy of theology. When church and state coincided, then theology that advised on matters of church order was politically relevant. With the separation of church and society, and even state, such relevance has been lost. This suggests that Davis sees the contemporary problem cast as an internalist/externalist dynamic where theology now has an ecclesial relevance and a social relevance which have been, and remain, historically separated. Moreover, it suggests that from the point of view of a theology based on orthodoxy, the tenuous relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis is ever more strained. Indeed, Davis says scathingly, that in theologies of orthodoxy: "...any appeal to practice is simply an excuse for lack of theory. So called orthopraxis, spontaneous and independent is quite simply a myth."<sup>54</sup> This theory/praxis dichotomy is quite clearly not unique to theology. In theology, however it has a unique poignancy, insofar as, for Davis at least, the essence of theology, the mystical moment in faith, is destroyed.

The parallels here with John Milbank's presentation of "...the pathos of modern theology" which is "its false humility..."<sup>55</sup> cannot go un-noted. Milbank alleges that this false humility leads theologians to attempt to do exactly what

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<sup>54</sup> Davis TPS p 61.

<sup>55</sup> John Milbank *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond secular Reason*. 1990. Basil Blackwell. Oxford Davis is concerned that: "According to Milbank, there is no single system of propositional truth. We cannot by argument refute theses opposed to our own. We have our story and they have theirs. It is a question of who has the better story. We can use rhetoric to persuade but not to argue. I find that a disturbing prospect. Political debate is already almost exclusively a matter of rhetoric, with little in the way of argument. Is any dialectical critique of the rhetoric that pours over us to be ruled out of order? The fact that human reason is finite and belongs to this historical world does not mean that we can drop the distinction between truth and falsity, right and wrong just and unjust..." ... A balanced concept of reason demands that we hold in tension two apparently contradictory features: the historical, embodied practical character of human reason and the transcendence of particularity implied by such a claim to objective truth or universal morality." (Davis RMS p 13).



Davis does, that is incorporate ideas and methods from secular social theory into theology. It is his argument that this is wrong and that, in fact, secular social theory depends extensively on false theological assumptions.<sup>56</sup> From here Milbank develops a refutation of modernity and Enlightenment reason enabling him to discard it in an attempt to establish a latter day, albeit post-modern, *Civitas Dei*.<sup>57</sup> Davis is aware of this, and his retort to Milbank is precisely that there is some acceptable content to modernity, and therefore, it requires 'determinate negation'<sup>58</sup> not a Milbankian, abstract negation. This determinate negation necessitates the sort of involvement and engagement with Enlightenment rationality that Davis advocates. Echoing Habermas, he suggests that we should return to the various crossroads that the Enlightenment travelled through and re-think the path that was available but not travelled. This, he contends, relocates us in the "... discourse of the counter-Enlightenment that was present in the Enlightenment from the beginning."<sup>59</sup>

In rejoining the discourse of the Enlightenment in order to resolve the problem of the misery of theology Davis critically assumes the Habermasian analysis of modernity to provide a useful and illuminating description of the respective roles of theory and praxis. Following the Marxist historical, materialist

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<sup>56</sup> "For him [Milbank] the secular social sciences are a bastard form of theology – a heretical theology as it were. The eagerness of some theologians to incorporate modern secular social theory into theology is misplaced, Milbank argues. Modern theology has already swallowed more social science than is good for it, and on the other hand, modern secular social theory is more dependent upon theological assumptions than the social sciences are prepared to admit." (Davis RMS p 12)

<sup>57</sup> We shall return to Milbank again. However, it is important to note that there are alternatives to Davis's programme. There are also obvious parallels with Hauerwas and we shall see Milbank reappear in relation to Hauerwas. It should be noted that while Davis is extremely critical of Milbank (RMS Introduction) Hauerwas is in broad agreement.

<sup>58</sup> Davis RMS p 15 Hence Davis's appreciation of the Habermasian position. Milbank, on the other hand, leaves himself wide open to a performative contradiction. His work does not merely "... constitute an exercise in rhetorical persuasion, but a closely knit argument – an argument, therefore, to the effect that no argument is legitimate." (Davis RMS p 14)

<sup>59</sup> Davis RMS p 15.

tradition Habermas, and in turn Davis, focus on the reuniting of theory and praxis. Furthermore, in the sense and to the extent that such a tradition of enquiry examines the empirical data of actual situations on the way to providing the causal explanation of society required for emancipation to function, Davis maintains that it is an empirically falsifiable theory. Theology shackled to orthodoxy does not have this property. Critical theory, therefore, provides for Davis an important methodological paradigm for theology. He says:

"It is not difficult to harmonise religious faith and fallibilism. What is needed in order to do so is a distinction between faith and beliefs. Faith is the fundamental religious response. It is an orientation towards unlimited reality as accepted in a transcendent response or movement of unrestricted love. This faith-love is divine revelation in the primary sense of divine presence in our minds and in our hearts. ... gives rise to a body of religious beliefs, constituting a tradition. The absoluteness of associated with our religious response belongs not to doctrines... The absoluteness of faith should not be confused with the certitude of belief..."<sup>60</sup>

To develop this paradigm, Davis draws on Habermas's notion of the intrinsic relationship between knowledge and what Habermas terms 'human interests'.<sup>61</sup> He understands Habermas to say that there are three interests constituting three modes of knowledge:

"They are: the technical interest which grounds the information that gives technical control and is related to the social medium of work; the practical interest which lies behind the interpretative knowledge of a common tradition, required for human action and communication and is related to the social medium of language; the emancipatory interest which makes possible, what he [Habermas] calls 'critique', namely knowledge that takes the form of analyses of freeing a person from reified social powers, that is from

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<sup>60</sup> Davis TPS p 27.

<sup>61</sup> Habermas KHI.

unanalysed relations of oppression and dependence and is thus related to the social medium of power.”<sup>62</sup>

These interests are linked to social media because for Habermas the subject cannot be construed as anything other than “... the empirical naturally generated and socially formed subject.”<sup>63</sup> A subject, thus grounded, will have interests similarly grounded. Davis agrees that these interests are properly understood not merely psychologically but “... transcendentally as deep-seated invariants constituting the *a priori* structure of human knowing.”<sup>64</sup> Davis would not, and does not, imply that knowledge is foundational to human being. Nor would Davis “... reduce our spiritual life to a struggle for knowledge but insofar as we are engaged in knowing our knowing must satisfy the general conditions of knowing and of the various forms of knowledge and the method that each form demands.”<sup>65</sup> The philosophical and theological traditions that Davis criticises come in for criticism precisely because they extend universalist and, therefore, foundational claims which cannot be sustained at either a theoretical or practical level within those traditions.<sup>66</sup> As Davis points out correctly, this gives rise to questions “... circling round exclusivism versus pluralism, universalism versus particularism, [and] certitude versus fallibilism.”<sup>67</sup> Davis contends that Christian orthodoxy, having made these foundational claims and forced the questions, is in no shape to answer them. In other words Christian orthodoxy presents a claim to certitude which is quite simply incompatible with the fallible nature of all human knowledge including religious knowledge, if a special case can be made for any such thing. These inconsistencies, all too apparent to Davis, bring him back to Habermas and his notion that religion or theology characterised like this is redundant. Hence he

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<sup>62</sup> Davis RMS p 70.

<sup>63</sup> Davis RMS p 70.

<sup>64</sup> Davis RMS p 70.

<sup>65</sup> Davis TPS p 24.

<sup>66</sup> Davis TPS p 25.

<sup>67</sup> Davis TPS p 25.

proceeds to examine a better understanding of the nature of knowledge as well as the interests implicit in such a constitution, to make sense of matters religious.

This examination is underpinned by Davis's firm belief that the Gospel has a particular expository and explanatory understanding of liberation or, as Habermas calls it, emancipation. This understanding provides means of closing the aporetic moment in Habermas's atheistic schema. Davis notes that emancipatory interest falls into a different category than either technical or practical interests. This is due to the way in which it is bound up with the process of self-reflection. Technical and practical interests are not at all tied up in the modes of knowledge that they ground; they involve cognitive action rather than communicative modes. Emancipatory interest, however, involves and implies self-reflection as a "... coming of the subject to self-transparency [which] coincides with the subject's move towards autonomy and responsibility."<sup>68</sup>

This distinction of emancipatory interest from the other cognitive forms of interest is extremely important, Davis contends, for understanding and rectifying the illegitimate claims of orthodoxy. As Davis says:

"The conscious movement of the subject in self-reflection toward self-transparent autonomy and responsibility is identical with the coming to an emancipatory knowledge that frees it from unrecognised dependencies. The interest in emancipation thus becomes actual as a conscious orientation in the knowledge given in self-reflection."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Davis TPS p 70.

<sup>69</sup> Davis TPS pp 70 -71.

As Davis points out, the third mode of knowledge, critique, is constituted by the unity of limited knowledge and emancipatory interest. Further to this though, intrinsic to any critique of ideology, or even orthodoxy, is a process of emancipatory self-reflection, or self-criticism. To achieve the critical interpretations of repressed structures, however, critique must be able to draw on a critical theory of society that provides a causal explanation of the present situation. Thus critique becomes a process of "... explanatory understanding, and only through explanatory understanding can the ideologically distorted communication within society be correctly interpreted."<sup>70</sup>

Christian orthodoxy, according to Davis, is inimical to this process of self-reflection. Within Christian orthodoxy there are, quite simply, components that are not open to the sort of revision that self-reflection demands. There are non-negotiable, minimal criteria that are held to be necessarily immune from self-reflection or revision: that is to say, they are not open to critique. Clearly if this is the case then Davis would have to agree with Habermas and consign theology to the private sphere. However, Davis, again developing and moving away from Habermas's understanding, construes critique to be much more subtle. To be precise, he suggests that there are two levels of critique or emancipatory knowledge. Firstly the development of critical theories:

"The claim of these to be true has to be justified in scientific discourse. Second there is the very process of self-reflection as the explanatory interpretations, enlightening people concerning their objective situation within society and thus freeing them from unrecognised dependencies."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Davis TPS p 71.

<sup>71</sup> Davis TPS p 71.

Alongside these modes of critique, and informed by them, stands political action. Implicit in political action is a practical and technical perspective on the realm of *Lebenspraxis* or the habit of living. This is also where the correct relationship of theory to praxis is to be activated for critical theology.

In his reconstruction of the Christian faith away from orthodoxy and towards faith, that is to say away from the primacy of theory towards a balanced relationship of praxis to theory, Davis invites us to understand Christianity as a way of life. Furthermore, the methodical elaboration of this way of life becomes theology. Which is to say that theology is a historically hermeneutical discipline, located within a hermeneutical tradition. On the one hand, theology understood as part of a tradition immune to critique, is grounded in practical interests. On the other hand, as a historically hermeneutical discipline it should be concerned precisely with generating the sort of causal explanations that self-reflection demands. Davis maintains therefore that the Christian faith, in presenting a way of life, fulfils the requirements of emancipatory interest. That he can make this reservation for Christianity has to do with his realisation that the critical theory of society from which Habermas works, and with which Davis is in broad agreement, working as it does from empirical data and subject to scientific discourse, is essentially falsifiable. As such it refuses the positivist fact-value distinction and is thus, he argues, "... a value impregnated investigation."<sup>72</sup> He is free to ask, therefore, whether or not an investigation impregnated with Christian values might not produce a different critical theory<sup>73</sup>: "Cannot the values enshrined in the historical myths of the Christians find new expression in a critical theory of

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<sup>72</sup> Davis TPS p 73.

<sup>73</sup> Davis TPS p 74.

history and society?"<sup>74</sup> As a way of life, he contends that Christian tradition comes under the second mode of knowledge, that is, it is grounded in the practical interest. It "... offers a common tradition or set of interpretations, which makes it possible people to orient their actions through symbolic interactions and mutual understanding."<sup>75</sup>

Christian faith, the Christian tradition and theology are historical and, as such, subject to distortions. Therefore we face a question "...[is] critique or emancipatory self-reflection ... an element intrinsic to the Christian faith or is the Christian faith ... simply the object, not the agent, of such self-reflection?"<sup>76</sup> Understood as a tradition of discourse, then, the Christian way of life and theology are, and can be, subject to enhanced democratisation and the realignment of reason and hence the agent of self-reflection. Therefore, while never again becoming a structural principle of society, the Christian tradition and theology can, nevertheless contribute to and motivate genuine political action in the public sphere. This contribution relies on what Davis calls a process of communication and falls in broadly with what "... Habermas analyses as communicative action and rationality in contrast to instrumental action and rationality".<sup>77</sup> Hence, Davis reserves the right to suggest that Christianity might make a positive contribution to social cultural and political life.

As to the question of whether critical, emancipatory self-reflection is an intrinsic moment within faith itself or a critique of faith from a position of

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<sup>74</sup> Davis TPS p 75.

<sup>75</sup> Davis TPS p 73.

<sup>76</sup> Davis TPS p 73.

<sup>77</sup> Davis WLWD p 122.



independent rationality. The answer clears out Davis's agenda. If it is the latter then the Christian tradition orientated to faith rather than orthodoxy and understood as *lebenspraxis* has failed. If the former then there is yet some hope that a systematised faith, or theology, might in fact engage usefully in the process of emancipatory reflection in praxis in reciprocal relationship to the world that shapes it. This is, of course, Davis's preferred position: an endeavour to relate theology to the modern tradition of criticism which brings about a theology the nature and task of which is "... itself engaged in the process of emancipatory reflection, sharing in that way with the project of the Enlightenment..."<sup>78</sup> while realigning the relationship between theory and praxis.

### 2.2.2. *The Role and Limits of Reason in Theological Discourse*

Having noted Davis's dependence on communicative reason in realigning theory to praxis, we must now make some more precise notes on the role and limits of rationality in Davis's understanding of theological discourse. In so doing we shall be able to introduce a second refinement of what we mean by post-orthodoxy. As we have observed, Davis's understanding of Habermas's post-metaphysical thinking, suggests that linguistic and pragmatic influences on contemporary philosophy and social theory have fostered a climate wherein narrative and social praxis are in the ascendancy. However, it is at this point that we find that while Davis acknowledges the validity of the insight he demurs from Habermas's exaggerated understanding of reason.

As Davis sees it, for Habermas to follow the procedures of discourse ethics, to engage in critique, requires, indeed presupposes, a community of moral agents.

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<sup>78</sup> Davis TPS p 24.



Unlike Hauerwas and MacIntyre, however, the community that Habermas envisages is the widest one possible. Norms are only valid when their consequences for the satisfaction of everyone's interest are acceptable to everyone as participants in the discourse.<sup>79</sup> Clearly, everyone who might have an interest, or an opinion ought, in principle, to be included. But is this not simply a tradition? In essence the answer is 'yes'. However, Habermas argues against the absoluteness of traditions setting up an opposition between "... the unplanned course of its [tradition's] spontaneous growth" and the reflective appropriation of tradition.<sup>80</sup> The reflective appropriation of tradition is enabled by critique. Critique in turn fosters an appreciation of the contingent character of tradition. This means, as Davis points out, that although the content might be appropriated, tradition ceases to operate as understood by communitarians. On this point it should be noted that Davis takes Habermas to mean that tradition, without critique, is a negative dynamic on an individual's life. Tradition without critique, for Habermas and for Davis, reinforces prejudice and authority. When tradition is coupled with critique we have a flexible structure of pre-judgements which "...is made transparent by reflection, it can no longer function as a set of prejudices."<sup>81</sup> We shall return to the question of tradition in the next section. In the meantime we should note Davis's disagreement with Habermas over the role and limits of reason in theological discourse.

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<sup>79</sup> Habermas MCCA p 132. This is generally known as the principle of universalisation by which Habermas supposes that he can ground moral principles in what he supposes to be the unavoidable presuppositions of argumentation. Put simply a norm can be justified if, and only if, the consequences that might foreseeably flow from universal adherence to such a norm could be accepted by all of those involved as participants in ideal discourse. For an in-depth discussion of this issue see Stephen White *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas*. 1988 CUP. Cambridge. Chapter 3.

<sup>80</sup> Davis TPS p 98.

<sup>81</sup> Davis TPS p 98.

Davis disagrees with Habermas on the basis of the latter's two-fold answer to the question of the rational grounding of values distinct from experience. Davis thinks that this two-fold distinction represents an "... exaggeration of the function of theoretical reason."<sup>82</sup> Focusing on freedom, and using it as symbolic of a nexus of values tied up with emancipation or liberation, Davis suggests that it, and they, must first be experienced before they can become principles. Any talk of freedom without experience of it would be unintelligible as well as ill-advised. It is, he says:

"... a social and cumulative experience; it is preserved and transmitted only as an historical form of life, namely a tradition. The entry to that tradition is shared by action, not by discourse."<sup>83</sup>

Theoretical reason, in the form of discourse, without grounding in praxis can have only a limited role as either the means or the grounds of consensus on values.

Davis presses this point home, quite effectively, by reminding us that Habermas's ideal discourse requires at least the anticipation of an ideal speech situation. Such a situation requires, in turn, an ideal social situation. He says:

"[t]he extent to which an ideal social situation is absent is the extent to which any discourse will be lacking rationality. It would seem to follow that if the social situation renders freedom seriously problematical, discourse will be impotent to meet the difficulty. How can freedom be grounded by a discourse free from constraint when such discourse is possible only if freedom has been attained?"<sup>84</sup>

This insightful comment marks a significant break with Habermas's reliance on reason and discourse and sets the scene for Davis's important and distinctive application of theology given the reconstitution of its nature and task. Davis says

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<sup>82</sup> Davis TPS p 95.

<sup>83</sup> Davis TPS pp 95-96.

<sup>84</sup> Davis TPS p 96.

that the appeal to reason presupposes "... an open community of discourse, in which all the members participate in seeking knowledge and in which any claim to acceptance must rest upon evidence and argumentation open to scrutiny and criticism by all."<sup>85</sup> In such a community as Davis envisages, therefore, reason plays an extremely important role. That is not to say, however, that there are no limits to this role.

The limits to the role of reason, for Davis, arise from the fact that human reason properly understood, is limited, embodied and fallible.<sup>86</sup> He concedes that such a stance may not have the excitement of the rhetoric of post-modernity. However, unlike the post-modernists, he thinks that it is a mistake to assume that the end of a representational epistemology issues in the death of truth itself. He perceives the critical thrust of Enlightenment reason turning in upon itself, which does not of necessity lead us into post-modernity.<sup>87</sup> It does, however, bring us back to a more balanced understanding of the role of substantive reason and tradition-based discourse.

Davis's preferred understanding of the role and limits of rationality in critical theological discourse is to modify Habermas's 'exaggerated' understanding. He argues instead for a limited, embodied and fallible conception of rationality. This conception follows directly from what Davis sees as the proper relationship

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<sup>85</sup> Davis WLWD p 109.

<sup>86</sup> Although having made this point in print Davis is keen to reinforce it. He has always maintained the importance of communicative rationality but does not wish to lose sight of the significance of substantive reason in the development of modernity. Indeed he recognises that political action may sometimes require strategic reasoning and therefore the context of that reasoning becomes extremely important. Personal conversation Cambridge February 1996.

<sup>87</sup> Davis TPS p 26 see also RMS pp 106 & 109.

between theory and praxis. That this indicates a modified retrieval of substantive reason requires us to examine more closely the concept of tradition and its role in generating discursive norms and identity. We shall begin by recognising that Davis attempts to ground Christian values in tradition.

### *2.2.3. The Role of Tradition in Generating Discursive Norms and Identity*

In examining Davis's endeavour to ground Christian values in tradition, we uncover a third refinement of what we mean by post-orthodoxy. In his limited appeal to tradition, Davis follows a critical understanding of Habermas and is not unsympathetic to the notion that values are grounded in tradition. Nevertheless, Davis maintains Habermas's hesitation about relying heavily on tradition to generate substantive rationality, because of the spectre of authoritarianism that haunts the likes of MacIntyre.<sup>88</sup> He says, whenever the transcendence of "... Christian experience has been recognised, the indispensable function of tradition and community re-emerges even after the doctrinalized form of tradition and of an absolutist form of Church authority have been rejected."<sup>89</sup>

We still have to ask, however, what Davis means when he talks of tradition here. It is clear that he recognises that a community/tradition such as that envisaged by MacIntyre or Hauerwas is little more than a collection of prejudices, inimical to critique and therefore at odds with emancipation. But it is equally clear that Habermas's understanding of tradition does not provide, for Davis, a sufficient fitting model for the operation of Christian faith as he understands it. This raises an ecclesiological question in that the normative community for the

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>89</sup> Davis WLWD p 80.

discourse of the Christian tradition is the church. Thus we are faced directly with the problems of dogma and orthodoxy as the church relies on both to engender identity and governance. This is an issue to which I shall return in Chapter 6. For the moment, though, we should note two general points about Davis's understanding of tradition. First of all returning to the question of freedom as an exemplar value, although going along with Habermas to a large extent, Davis reserves the right to draw attention to the fact that there is a sense in which freedom often manifests itself with a "... gratuitous, unexpected, unaccountable character."<sup>90</sup> This, he suggests, is best summed up by the theological concept of grace. Habermas is inevitably closed to such an irrational, mystical element in emancipation. He will, therefore, only give a part of the story. Indeed, it follows from Davis's realigned notion of theory and practice which presupposes an ideal social condition or tradition, that Habermas's rational analysis of the Western cultural tradition uncovers emancipatory values like freedom, justice and equality precisely because of his participation in that tradition. In other words, could Habermas have identified emancipatory self-reflection or critique or liberation as values had they not already formed a significant tradition in Western ethical discourse? We might put this another way by suggesting that Habermas is being either naïve or disingenuous in not explicitly acknowledging his debt to theological ethical discourse. It is not so much that there are vestigial traces of a universal moral code at work in Western moral philosophy as there is a vital theological heritage being wished away.

Secondly, however, Davis also sounds a warning against those like Hauerwas, MacIntyre and Milbank who sit, as it were, on the other side. Too

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<sup>90</sup> Davis TPS pp 102 – 103.

much focus on tradition leads us back into dogmatism and orthodoxy. There are those, he says, that consider belonging to a tradition as the only way of understanding ourselves as humans and overcoming the "... arrogant inhumanity of technical reason."<sup>91</sup> He asks "[a]re we, then, to turn back ... to a renewed acceptance of the past as normative, that is to dogmatism?"<sup>92</sup> The answer as we have seen, is a resounding no. Although Davis does concur that theology is only properly grounded in the social praxis of a living faith, this faith transcends particular cultures and historical ages.

In the last chapter of *Theology and Political Society* we see Davis construct a fascinating argument for this contention. Following Habermas's theory of the history of religion, Davis summarises his notion that the cultural life of societies is not a random process. Thus, it:

"... follows a rationally reconstructible pattern of development. His [Habermas's] argument for this is an interlocking series of considerations ... social systems are engaged in a double process of exchange ... first the appropriation of outer nature, namely the non-human environment, through production and, second, the appropriation of inner nature, which means human material, through socialisation ... The adaptation or socialisation is brought about through normative structures, in which human needs are interpreted and various actions allowed or made obligatory. Because normative structures are thus the means of socialisation, the social integration of inner nature marches in step with the normative claims that call for justification."

This summary of Habermas's interlocking considerations leads Davis to conclude that, since one can draw an equation between socialisation and the cultural life of a society, that cultural life is also "... directional and embodies an irreversible

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<sup>91</sup> Davis TPS p 30.

<sup>92</sup> Davis TPS p 30.

<sup>93</sup> Davis TPS p 162.

sequence.”<sup>94</sup> So, in the same way as science and technology represent an inner logic of rational sequence, normative claims also follow their own inner logic. The result of this contention is that, so long as a tradition, or the directional and irreversible sequence, does not lose its continuity “... socially attained stages of moral consciousness cannot be forgotten and any deviation is experienced as regression.”<sup>95</sup>

Davis goes on to point out that, in the directional process of human development, certain trends can be identified: “... the expansion of the secular in relation to the sacred; the movement from heteronomy to autonomy; the evacuation of cognitive contents from world views, so that cosmology is replaced by a pure system of morality; the shift from tribal particularism to universalistic and individualised orientation; increasing reflexivity in the mode of belief.”<sup>96</sup> These features have been discussed at length with regard to Habermas in the previous chapter and we need not go into further detail here. I should, however, reiterate that it manifestly demonstrates that Habermas, and in turn Davis, understand the history of religion as having participated in the development of a process of reflection and thus represents a tradition of enquiry. Furthermore, this development is universal and not specific to one religious tradition insofar as the history of religions can be seen as the history of religion.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Davis TPS p 162.

<sup>95</sup> Davis TPS p 163.

<sup>96</sup> Davis TPS p 163.

<sup>97</sup> In this regard Davis draws our attention to the work of Rainer Döbert a younger collaborator of Habermas. Döbert sees the increasing reflexivity of the mode of belief as the determining factor of the features listed above. Ibid



Davis makes this contention for three reasons. First of all, "... past religious history is not fully intelligible unless it is understood as a single history of human religiousness."<sup>98</sup> Only by understanding the history of religion in this way can one do justice to the similar events in the development of various, apparently unconnected religious traditions. Moreover, it is the only way to acknowledge that, for the most part, religious traditions have, in fact, had a considerably more intertwined relationship than particular accounts might suggest. Secondly, Davis suggests that the religious exclusiveness which gave us the particular histories is itself part of a more overall history and may have reached the end of "... its historical usefulness."<sup>99</sup> Thirdly, one has to account for a contemporary convergence of religious traditions which generates a transformative effect on each of the traditions in question. Davis bases this contention on the insights of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Smith provides an interesting vantage point from which no religious history can ever appear quite the same again. He cites Cantwell Smith "... one is beginning to discern perhaps total history of man's religiousness, constituting a pattern in which the rise of separated religious communities constitutes a meaningful episode."<sup>100</sup>

While it is outwith the scope of this thesis to indulge in a critique of Cantwell Smith we can, nevertheless, see that by picking up this insight, Davis is now in a position to interpret the history of religions within an overall picture of the history of religion. From here he can interpret the history of religion as the development of a process of reflection "... through which human beings begin to gain clarity in regard to themselves and free themselves from the domination of

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<sup>98</sup> Davis TPS p 171.

<sup>99</sup> Davis TPS p 172.

<sup>100</sup> Cantwell Smith cited by Davis TPS p 172.



normative systems that impose themselves with nature-like compulsion.”<sup>101</sup> We have to realise that the opposite of such a compulsion is, as Davis puts it, mutual agreement on norms communicatively achieved.<sup>102</sup> This suggests for Davis that, since the mutual agreement comes about through a free, reciprocal process of communication, then the history of religion can be seen as “... the evolution of communicative competence.”<sup>103</sup>

To understand this claim it is important to reiterate that Davis accepts Habermas's contention, as we saw in Chapter 1, that the discursive redemption of normative claims, involved in discourse ethics, itself follows an irreversible sequence from myth through religion to philosophy and ideology and finds its culmination in critique. The history of religion, therefore, presents an essential component in this sequence from myth to critique insofar as, for a time, religion publicly identified and mediated norms and moral value. As we have seen, the expansion of the secular in regard to the sacred, the movement to autonomy and the shift from tribal particularism to a universalistic and individualised orientation, coupled to the rise of critique renders the mediating efficacy of religion obsolete. The development of communicative competence, however, passes over into another, public, sphere of communication and discourse wherein norms and values are worked out. While all that is left of religion and religious traditions, for Habermas, is a universal moral code Davis recognises the significant contribution that the Christian tradition, adequately reformed, has and might continue to have

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<sup>101</sup> Davis TPS pp 163f.

<sup>102</sup> Davis TPS Chapter 7 “Pluralism, Privacy and the Interior Self.” expresses this argument most clearly.

<sup>103</sup> Davis TPS pp 163f.

in developing communicative competence and generating discursive norms and identity.

### 2.3. Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that for Davis realigning theory and praxis, recognising the limits of rationality in theological discourse as well as the role of tradition in generating discursive norms is markedly different from adapting to fashionable appropriations of new ideas. Davis's critical theology, therefore, involves submitting the social and cultural pre-suppositions of orthodox tradition and theology to critique. Such an examination generates a self-aware re-appropriation of tradition. For Davis this represents the key difference between theology as usually practised and critical theology. That is to say, critical theology, done like this, describes a fundamental dynamic of the tradition itself because the situations wherein the tradition finds itself can never be conceived of as externally related to it. It is because of this that we can describe Davis's critical theology as post-orthodox. It is also because of this that we can intimate the possibility of 'adequate reform'. For as Davis says, traditions, and consequently the identity which those traditions engender, is betrayed when the theoretical dynamic of the tradition attempts to "... to keep an earlier form of the tradition intact in new conditions conceived as only externally related to it."<sup>104</sup> Consequently, Davis is clearly pointing towards a much more radical agenda than either liberation or political theology as he understands them.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, a tradition that operates to such a radical, reforming agenda generates a radical identity equated with the

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<sup>104</sup> Davis WLWD p 3.

<sup>105</sup> Davis goes to considerable length in TPS to analyse both political and liberation theologies. His subjects include Johan Baptist Metz, Dorothy Sölle and Jan Luis Segundo. In RMS he returns to this theme and includes a criticism of John Milbank as a representative of a latter day, politically significant theology.

interior self, which fosters authentic political action and realises the promise of critical theology. In the following chapter we move on to closer examination of the issues of identity and political action and an investigation of the promise of critical theology.

## 2.4. Summary

To sum up, in this chapter we have developed the theme of Davis's distinctive, post-orthodox critical theology. We have seen that while this theology makes use of the philosophical insights of Jürgen Habermas, it does not simply import them and criticises Habermas's overstated reliance on abstract reason and his understated appreciation of tradition in generating moral norms. I argued, therefore, that Davis's post-orthodoxy offered three important insights. First of all, it endeavours to realign theory and practice in the Christian life. Secondly, it shows how Habermas and the Enlightenment tradition have overstated the claims of rationality. Thirdly, it shows that Christianity, when theory and practice are properly aligned, and therefore eschewing orthodoxy, embodies a tradition of discourse that is not sectarian or oppressive. Finally, we suggested that Davis is pointing toward a much more radical agenda than either political or liberation theologies. The proper realignment of theory and practice leads to the possibility of a valid practical theology leading to the transformation of society in light of the transformative principle of Christian faith. In the next chapter, we turn our attention to the implications of Davis's post-orthodoxy for Christian ethics and the church generally. I will examine these implications through an investigation of the promise of critical theology, focusing on identity and political action. Thereafter, I will comment on the shape of church that Davis calls us to.

### **Chapter 3. Charles Davis and the Promise of Critical Theology**

In the previous chapter we followed Charles Davis's application of Habermas's critical social theory to theology. The result was what Davis construes as post-orthodox critical theology. We shall now examine the impact of this critical theology on Christian ethics and thence the church. As we have noted Davis maintains that the only appropriate Christian response to revelation is to understand Christianity as offering an ethical way of life wherein theory and praxis are realigned, to provide a way of being and acting. This response may be partially articulated in propositions and it may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a practical way of life. Consequently, the impact of Davis's post-orthodox critical theology on Christian ethics and the church will be significant.

As we have seen, for Davis, critical theology is concerned with putting its own house in order by examining the presuppositions of traditional theology. This examination means submitting these presuppositions to critique, which in turn generates the possibility of a self-aware appropriation of the tradition to which one belongs. These presuppositions find their expression in statements of faith and in praxis. These two are brought together in tradition. As far as Davis is concerned,

one cannot assume the integrity of any or all of these things simply because they are religious. In other words, their identification with or as a religious tradition does not generate a special case for exemption from critique:

“... critical theology acknowledges that the Christian tradition, like other traditions, is not exclusively a source of truth and value, but a vehicle of untruth and false values and thus must be subjected to a critique of ideology and critically appropriated, not simply made one's own in an assimilative process of interpretation.”<sup>1</sup>

The self-aware assimilation of tradition, Davis argues, is a methodology that is essential for any theology which is capable of redressing the excesses of modernity at the same time as making critical statements in the public sphere. Inevitably, the notion of ‘self-aware assimilation’ will raise questions concerning notions of religious and social identity.

It is the intention of this chapter to examine the impact of these questions and the consequent appropriate religious identity that Davis sees as impelled by critical theology. Such an exploration is a precursor to a broader question concerning the form that the community of faith will take in relation to critical theology. The form of the community of faith in itself is a partial realisation of the promise of critical theology. This promise can be summarised briefly as the realisation of a theology capable of redressing the excesses of modernity at the same time as making critical statements in the public sphere, thus facilitating authentic political action. Part fulfilment of the promise of critical theology, then,

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<sup>1</sup>Davis TPS p 25.

is the politicising of the church and the inevitable impact that this will have on the shape and scope of the church. We shall conduct this examination by looking at four topics: first, religious identity; second, identity and the Christian tradition; third, plurality and identity and the problem of revelation; and, finally, privacy and religious identity. In the second part of the chapter we shall assess the implications of Davis's critical Christian ethics for the church.

### 3.1. The Implications of Davis Post-orthodoxy for Christian Ethics

As I have suggested, the implication of post-orthodoxy for Christian ethics will be significant. In this section we shall explore this impact. In order to assess this impact we must first provide a standard definition of Christian ethics.<sup>2</sup> Moral theology, as it became apparent by the time of the reformation and the Counter-Reformation, had developed away from being a guide to the confessionals and penances into a theologically profound and complex discipline aimed at guiding the conscience of the individual believer against a background of practical deliberations about how to live a good life. The primary task of moral theology is to clarify Christian moral concepts, showing how distinctive Christian modes of expressing moral questions arise from the scriptures and comparing them to other ways in which moral questions can be put.<sup>3</sup> The particular focus of Christian ethics as distinct from Moral theology, however, is not only to relate an understanding of God to human behaviour but to explore the appropriate human response to God required by acknowledgement of the life death and resurrection of Christ as the grounding of Christian ethical reflection.<sup>4</sup> As such, Christian ethics requires the

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<sup>2</sup> We shall make use of this definition again in relation to Stanley Hauerwas.

<sup>3</sup> See MacQuarrie and Childress (eds.) *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* 1986 SCM London. Barth *Ethics* 1981 T&T Clark Edinburgh.

<sup>4</sup> Bonhoeffer *Ethics* 1985 SCM Press, London. pp 3ff "The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection (Bonhoeffer says that it matters little in his discussion whether one

generation of guidelines, in the light of a formal understanding of revelation, for both personal and social activity. Thus understood Christian ethics involves consideration of religious identity, tradition and political action.

### *3.1.1. Religious Identity as the Basis of Authentic Political Action*

We start this investigation into the promise of critical theology, therefore, by examining Davis's understanding of religious identity as the basis for authentic political action. Although Davis believes that Habermas would disagree, he points out that:<sup>5</sup>

“... I see the basic religious identity which I have described as coinciding with the new social identity he [Habermas] has analysed, though articulating it at a deeper level. ... I contend here that the new universal identity now emerging is a new articulation, beyond

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makes morality and immorality, valuable or valueless, actual and proper being and not actual an proper being synonymous with good and evil.). The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge. In launching an attack on the underlying assumptions of all other ethics, Christian ethics stands so completely alone that it becomes questionable whether there is any purpose in speaking of Christian ethics at all. But if one does so notwithstanding, that can only mean that Christian ethics claims to discuss the origin of the whole problem of ethics, and thus to professes to be a critique of all ethics simply as ethics. “Already in the possibility of the knowledge of good and evil Christian ethics discerns a falling away from the origin. Man at his origin knows only one thing: God. It is only in the unity of his knowledge of God that he knows of other men, of things and of himself. He knows all things only in God, and God in all things. The knowledge of good and evil shows that he is no longer at one with his origin.” In this passage, and the chapter from which it comes, it is Bonhoeffer's intention to highlight the difference between ethics generally and Christian ethics. Humanity was originally created in the image of God, and aware of his origin in God. The fall has caused a disunion and obscured humanity's awareness of its true origin. All ethical endeavour, therefore, reflects this disjunction and focus on interpersonal relationships and conscience. In contrast, he cites (pp 9 – 13) Christ's ethics, true ethics that start from Christ's unity with God.

<sup>5</sup> We have already explored the reasons for Habermas's rejection of the possibility of religious discourse fulfilling the conditions of mutual understanding required for communicative action to work. See Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this thesis where Chapter 2 explores the significant differences between Davis and Habermas.



particularism and orthodoxy, of the religious identity  
of the past not its abolition without remainder.”<sup>6</sup>

Here we see Davis making a profound departure from Habermas’s contention that the identity involved in authentic political action cannot be public and religious since the new emancipated social identity transcends specifically religious understandings of identity.<sup>7</sup> Davis, on the other hand, sees the two identities as the same.

Habermas’s description of the development from myth to critique, Davis argues, presents a crisis in terms of identity and political action and thus presents a crisis both for the individual, at a social level, and for the church. The consequence of this process of “... clarification and purification of the universalistic structures originally introduced by the world religions is a cleavage between the ego-identity derived from universalistic structures and collective identity as bound up with a particular community.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, we face an identity crisis because the communities or traditions that provided a collective identity as well as an individual identity, and which went hand in hand with religious consciousness, suffer at the hands of critique and are consigned to the private sphere. The problem of identity, Davis suggests, remained latent because of several factors: (1) the vestigial traces of earlier identity formations derived from myth and magic. (2) the distinctions made between the community of believers and those who were outside and (3) the dualism established between sacred and secular, which manifested itself in terms such as church and state, transcendence and immanence. Nevertheless, identity problems were never far away from the moment totalising

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<sup>6</sup> Davis TPS p 174.

<sup>7</sup> Davis TPS p 161.

<sup>8</sup> Davis TPS p 164.

religious world-views ceased to function.<sup>9</sup> In such a secular society, which we have noted describes our contemporary context, what remains of the substantive business of religion lies, more or less, in a type of consumer preference for private consumption as a pastime. Religion, therefore, does not offer much to any notion of human identity nor can it contribute much, if anything, to effective political action. Thus, we are faced with an identity crisis wherein the privatised self of modernity rather than the interior self dominates.<sup>10</sup>

The distinction that Davis draws here between the private self of bourgeois individualism and the interior self of, what he refers to, as genuine religious faith is an important one. This interior self is identified with the mystical element in religion that construes Christian faith as a transformative principle and not a body of objective knowledge. In this regard, the interior self that Davis considers essential is defined as "... the conscious subject as distinctly aware of his or her individual being and activity. The interior self is the self-reflective self, the self as a self aware subject, constituting an interior world over against the external world."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Davis RMS pp 135 – 136.

<sup>10</sup> Davis is referring here to a description of the modern self that Metz, Sölle and others have employed. Bourgeois religion, as they describe it, reflects the radical separation of the social and personal aspects of ethical, political and theological concern. Similarly it reflects the strain on the link between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The development of bourgeois religion arose from the correlative social development. With this came an increasing degree of social privatisation and a breakdown in the structural, relational web of society, and the dominance of the privatised self. The process of privatisation limits Christianity (even, as *lebenspraxis*) to the realm of personal integration and excludes it from the whole realm of public and social life. Large-scale structural concerns in society are generally only a matter of concern at a secondary level that results from working out individual experience. This results in an introspective religious sentimentality and hence an inability to deal with the significant pragmatic issues of society and culture. See J.B Metz (Peter Mann [trans.]) *The Emergent Church and The Future of Christianity in a post-Bourgeois World* 1981. Crossroad, New York. (David Smith [trans.]) *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. 1981 Burn & Oates. London. D. Sölle ( John Shelly [trans]) *Political Theology* 1974. Fortress Press Philadelphia.

<sup>11</sup> Davis WLWD p 97.

As we have seen, Davis has attempted to rescue this transformative principle from what he regards as the overwhelming and oppressive clutch of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy and inauthentic political action go hand in hand insofar as inauthentic politics is simply an administration of a bureaucratised social system, which is in turn inimical to emancipation. It is Davis's claim that the interior self of religious identity is the starting point of authentic political action in the sense that authentic politics, for Davis, operate under conditions of freedom. These are the same conditions under which the interior self, as distinct from the private self, is realised. Authentic politics, then is "... a process of communication among fully individual subjects in freedom."<sup>12</sup>

Placed in relation to Davis's understanding of tradition in generating discursive norms and identity, we can now begin to see the way in which a new religious identity develops. The religious identity that rests on the interior self is, by definition, self-aware and self-reflective. Hence, the self-aware assimilation of tradition is second nature and the first step towards authentic political action. This new religious identity will enable the critical theologian to speak out prophetically in the public sphere and constantly to revise his or her own tradition in relation to the demands of the public sphere.

### *3.1.2. Identity and the Christian Tradition*

We are now in a position to enquire of the particular implications of this new identity for the Christian tradition. This is not an insignificant issue since traditionally Christian theology has articulated particular constructive existential

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<sup>12</sup> Davis WLWD p 1.

and dogmatic claims that are ostensibly immune to critique. In order to understand fully the implications for the Christian tradition, we must first of all return to the question of tradition, generally considered, in Davis's thought. Thereafter, we will be able to explore the particular concerns of religious identity for the Christian tradition.<sup>13</sup> The purpose of this discussion, then, is to establish the viability of Davis's claim that "...basic Christian identity today is not grounded upon membership in a particular Church, but upon participation in an ongoing, and therefore future-oriented Christian history."<sup>14</sup>

Davis understands the history of the Christian tradition as relating precisely to a directional and irreversible sequence. By implication, any other view is limited. To this extent we have to think of the Christian religious identity, as it relates to that tradition, more as a part of a wider religious and social identity. With sympathy for Habermas, and developing the insights of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Davis encourages us to think of the history of particular religious traditions as the history of participation in a single total history.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Davis claims that this process of generating religious and social identity intimates the end of orthodoxy: that is to say the end of a religious identity mediated through the fixed objectified contents of a particular religious tradition.<sup>16</sup> From all of this, however, Davis concludes that basic religious identity is neither "...grounded upon membership in a particular Church..." nor even religious tradition. Rather, it is given by "...active participation in a universality to be realised in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> Davis RMS pp 131 -152. This chapter was also published in Browning and Schüssler-Fiorenza eds. *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*. op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> Davis TPS p 171.

<sup>15</sup> Davis TPS p 171.

<sup>16</sup> Davis TPS p 172.

Present working for a yet-to-be-realised universality can already unite people of different positions.”<sup>17</sup> The problem, then, is not simply an erosion of Christian identity in the face of a secular onslaught. As we shall see, in some senses Davis would not consider this to be a problem at all. More problematical is “... the blurring of the religious identity of Christians by the acceptance of other religions.”<sup>18</sup> Clearly, if we consider Christianity as an episode, all be it a significant episode, in a single history of religion, then such acceptance is mandatory. This raises the question of the Christian tradition’s response to political and religious plurality in the public sphere.

Tradition and religious identity now need to be scrutinised in the light of religious plurality. Davis does not see plurality as an evil to be eliminated. Rather plurality is “...the appropriate expression of the transcendence of the religious object, of human freedom and of the historical mediation of human truth and value.”<sup>19</sup> On this point, as we noted in the previous chapter, Davis holds out against Habermas, criticising him for an over exaggeration of the role of discursive rationality and its universalising potential. The universalised religious identity which Davis envisages focuses on the what he calls the unity of communication in the “... lasting differences of historical experiences and remembrance and consequently of tradition, though these remain under a constant process of development and revision.”<sup>20</sup> An important consideration for Davis, therefore, is that we frame all our considerations of tradition and identity in a context that

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<sup>17</sup> Davis TPS p 173.

<sup>18</sup> Davis RMS p 133.

<sup>19</sup> Davis RMS p 174.

<sup>20</sup> Davis TPS p 174. It is precisely on this point that Davis thinks Habermas understates the role of substantive rationality in communicative action.

recognises and acknowledges the complex pluralist structure of our contemporary situation.<sup>21</sup> As we mentioned earlier, Davis sees culture or socialisation as the most important factor in the development of the modern worldview. As he says:

“...one can say that modern culture distinguishes three worlds, to all of which human beings are related in their living: the external or objective world of human knowledge, the social world of practice with its norms, and the subjective world of self awareness. Because these three worlds have emerged as distinct, modern culture clearly differentiates the objective from the subjective, history and society from nature, sincerity and truthfulness from objective truth.”<sup>22</sup>

This list of characteristic dichotomies describes the context of plurality within which the theologian has to operate. It is important to note that Davis does not attempt to distinguish a sphere specific to religious faith and experience. It is, he contends, a mistake to assume that religion should designate a special realm of meaning or practice.

Davis's reluctance to maintain a special preserve in which religious consciousness operates has significant results. He concludes that authentic political action, which occurs in a pluralist context, relates precisely to questions of identity, since he understands the interior self to be the locus of both the proper reflective relationship between the individual and tradition, and the basis for authentic political action. Hence, because of the way in which Davis understands religious tradition as both subject to and an agent of social practice, he maintains

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<sup>21</sup> This is a recurring theme for Davis. See particularly Chapter 7 of TPS pp 158 - 181. Chapter 1 of RMS pp 21 - 47.

<sup>22</sup> Davis RMS p 51. See also earlier in this chapter on Davis's reading of Habermas for a comprehensive description of this cultural development.

that religious identity and social identity are closely linked. Moreover, the conditions surrounding religious and social identity are the same so that political pluralism is intimately linked to religious pluralism and hence to authentic political action. Thus Davis justifies his righteous indignation at privatised religion and his worry about the failure or inadequacies of so called political or liberation theologies. If religious identity and authentic political action is ever to have a religious base in the public sphere then it is as "...a post-conventional, universalistic identity, personal and collective as grounded in the structure of human communication."<sup>23</sup> Here 'post-conventional' relates to the second, or conventional level, of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development as read by Habermas.<sup>24</sup> Habermas felt that this level did not adequately describe the communicative, consensus orientated structure of discourse ethics which he therefore describes as post-conventional.<sup>25</sup> From this Davis concludes that whereas traditional religious people could be identified as having a conventional identity, that is to say they conform to pre-formulated teaching and established practices. The new religious identity equates moral and societal development with the post-conventional level, wherein political action depends on religious identity which, in turn, rests on the interior self.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, there is still a question mark lingering over the Christian tradition to be considered. The question mark relates to the status of plurality, pluralism and identity in the face of the revelation that marks the church out as distinct from all other communities or traditions.

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<sup>23</sup> Davis RMS p 150.

<sup>24</sup> Habermas TCA vol. 1. Davis RMS pp 51f.

<sup>25</sup> Davis RMS Chapter 8.

<sup>26</sup> For a clear description of Habermas's understanding of Kohlberg see McCarthy *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*. 1978 Hutchison, London. pp 250 – 251 and the table provided by Outhwaite in *Habermas: A Critical Introduction*. 1994. Polity Press, Cambridge. pp 52 – 53.



3.1.3. *Plurality and Identity and the Problem of Revelation*

Within a pluralist context there is a specific problem for a religious tradition such as Christianity whose impetus comes from a perceived special revelation or set of revelations. Indeed, Davis is a Christian theologian whose argument suggests that critical theology relates to the Christian Gospel. Davis further recognises that the present social and religious situation requires more than the adaptation and redeployment of already existing dogmas and orthodoxy.<sup>27</sup> No one tradition can possibly pretend to provide the solution to the massive problems that face humanity today.<sup>28</sup> And yet he recognises that the Christian tradition has a mission to do just that: Christians are called to act in the world, to mediate the kingdom of God to humanity. It is in response to this call to action that Davis has structured his critical theology and, on the way, provided a new insight into religious identity based, broadly speaking, on the idea that the history of religious traditions form a single history of religion which in turn reflects a history of the development of communicative competence. However, this brings us back to the question raised earlier concerning the distinctiveness, or at least the feeling of distinctiveness, of identity that those committed to a particular religious tradition feel and which, therefore, directs their action.

Much of the claim to distinctiveness, says Davis, rests on the notion that a particular religious tradition is the bearer or recipient of definitive revelation. The revelation of God to humanity that has occurred to those committed to the

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<sup>27</sup> Davis RMS p 149.

<sup>28</sup> This attitude is reminiscent of Hauerwas and MacIntyre's assertion that there is no neutral vantage point from whence to view moral discourse. Yet where Hauerwas, as we shall see, uses this insight as a springboard to asserting the superior (most truthful) nature of the Christian tradition, Davis is content simply to note that it suggests limits to the role of particular traditions.

tradition clearly gives an identity distinct from any other religious tradition. As Davis himself says:

“The God who reveals or is revealed is conceived of as a personal agent who acts and who speaks. Revelation is, therefore, understood as a communication from a personal God to human persons as persons.”<sup>29</sup>

This particularity is precisely the source of antipathy or antagonism towards other religious traditions. Identifying one's own tradition with another becomes extremely problematical.<sup>30</sup> Revelation marks out the believers of one tradition as distinct in their own minds from all other religious traditions.<sup>31</sup> We are left with the question of how to resolve conflict between such a tradition and those who do not share this understanding of revelation.<sup>32</sup> Is conversation viable, or is conversion the only appropriate action?<sup>33</sup> Davis's response to this is intriguing. Rather than

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<sup>29</sup> Davis RMS p 96.

<sup>30</sup> One thinks, for example, of the Decalogue. As we have noted elsewhere, religion in the past has provided an intense social bond. In turn, this bond affected moral behaviour, and to a degree, this is still the case among religious communities. If, then, we understand the Decalogue to be a set of injunctions which presuppose a fellowship with God, one's family, one's tribe and nation, we can see clearly that identity comes from a sense of moral obligation shared in these respective groups, which comes in turn from belonging to them. One might formulate it as follows: God who reveals himself to a people sanctions the idea of a people of God. In turn, being a people of God requires fidelity to the God who reveals, this fidelity can generate a sectarian, exclusive mentality, often reinforced by 'revealed' codes prescribing appropriate behaviour or proscribing inappropriate behaviour. For our purposes, it does not matter whether or not the Decalogue was revealed or constructed by successive generations of politically astute redactors, except to suggest that it supplies an self-understanding of distinctiveness to the people who believe themselves to be in receipt of revelation.

<sup>31</sup> Davis points to Hegel and Habermas as the archaeologists of this type of religious identity in TPS. So, too, does Mark C Taylor in *Erring: A Post-Modern A/Theology*. 1987. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. Chapter 2.

<sup>32</sup> This is of course the liberal/communitarian debate transposed into a theological key.

<sup>33</sup> Davis WLWD p 68, suggests that there are two ways of intellectually living the Christian faith. There is his way as we are explaining it, and there is a second way. In the second way “[p]ossessed of the essential truths concerning the human condition and intellectually converted by grace, the believer can proceed to despoil the Egyptians in the sense of incorporating the latest scientific ... duly purified and corrected, into a vast metaphysico-theological synthesis...” Davis is talking here about the intellectual aspect of Christianity, but the parallels at a practical level are clear: purification, correction and incorporation are but long-hand for conversion rather than conversation.

making some sort of facile claim suggesting that all revelation should somehow be regarded as equal, he dives right into the particular nature of revelation and in so doing turns this objection on its head. I will briefly outline his argument here.<sup>34</sup>

Davis begins by listing some observations concerning the nature of revelation. Firstly, that there are two ways of regarding revelation: one is to examine the means God has used to bring about communication with human persons; the second is to take the means for granted and to examine the relationship of the "... constituent elements asking questions about its permanence..." of the communication itself.<sup>35</sup> Davis opts for the second saying that revelation should be understood as a "relationship of communication in which God addresses human beings."<sup>36</sup>

Secondly, having made the foregoing distinction, Davis contends that revelation is public insofar as it relates to a community of faith. It is "... an initial communication ... embodied in a community and institutionalised so that subsequent generations may join themselves to that communication ... That means that revelation in its permanent reality is a particular kind of tradition."<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, the authority that revelation claims is positive. This means that it is "... tied to a particular occurrence and not reducible to the claims of a general rationality."<sup>38</sup> As such, Davis suggests, for revelation to be revelation it requires faith on the part of

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<sup>34</sup> The complete argument is to be found in Chapter 6 of RMS. pp 96 – 111, entitled "Revelation and the Rationality of Tradition."

<sup>35</sup> Davis RMS p 97.

<sup>36</sup> Davis RMS p 97.

<sup>37</sup> Davis RMS p 98.

<sup>38</sup> Davis RMS p 98.

the recipient. That is to say, revelation includes both the divine initiative and the faith by which that initiative is received.<sup>39</sup> In the sense that it is positive, revelation is essentially historical insofar as it relates to a particular set of events and manifests its continuity with those events in a particular tradition.<sup>40</sup>

Fourth, he has to ask what is it that is revealed? Which leads him on to discussion of the message of revelation. He replies, as we have noted elsewhere, that the message of revelation is a practical way of life "... the centre of reference which gives the revealed tradition its identity and continuity is the praxis which it embodies. Revelation is basically a way of life."<sup>41</sup> This way of life will, of course, have a theoretical component but it should always be properly understood as a function of the intellectual context within which the revelation arises.<sup>42</sup> Revelation is not, therefore, simply a set of propositional truth statements. Such an understanding, says Davis, has led us into a unacceptable orientation towards orthodoxy in the name of an identity which depends on doctrinal purity.

This description of revelation in its component parts allows Davis to recognise two concerns, which are continuity and rationality. Revealed religions, he suggests, make strong claims to continuity and this continuity makes, in turn, claims to rationality.

"...because of the account of the past it must give and its vision of the future. The account of the past has to

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<sup>39</sup> Davis RMS p 98.

<sup>40</sup> Davis RMS p 98.

<sup>41</sup> Davis RMS p 99.

<sup>42</sup> Davis RMS p 99.

include a story of an initial communication from which its particular tradition took its rise and which remains as its permanent basis. Again its vision of the future looks forward to a new state of affairs, individual collective or both, which as the final destiny of humankind will alone replace the religious tradition in its present functioning.”<sup>43</sup>

With this statement Davis takes us directly into the area that he sees as the heart of the problem. Continuity, both future and past represent the identity of the revealed tradition.<sup>44</sup> As Davis says in criticising the Christian tradition for not taking proper account of this: “One cannot say that theologians ... have come up with a theory that in a satisfactory fashion explains the strict continuity or identity claimed by the Christian tradition.”<sup>45</sup> Thus Davis explicitly acknowledges that religious identity is tied up with revelation and therefore with historical continuity. Furthermore, since history suggests that there have been many divisions and developments in the history of the Christian tradition, it is not enough simply to regard the case as closed at this point.

Within this context Davis discerns a converging of religious histories. This, of course, means a convergence of religious identities which depends upon a common, mystical core of religious experience which lies behind and ultimately

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<sup>43</sup> Davis RMS p 100.

<sup>44</sup> This concern with revelation is a matter that still exercises Davis’s thinking. In a conversation I had with him Davis February 1996, he was concerned about the question of revelation and continuity with particular reference to an article in *The Tablet* (2<sup>nd</sup> December 1995) by Nicholas entitled “On Not Inventing Doctrine” in which Lash defended the idea of papal infallibility and other doctrines. Davis maintained that Lash had missed the point and was erroneously content to understand theology as a tradition that was about the reiteration of orthodoxy. Davis felt that this led at worst, simply, to repetition and at best to keeping an earlier form of the tradition alive in a new context. Davis was concerned that, in fact, theology had much more to do with repetition in the Kierkegaardian sense. This leads to a continuity of expression but in direct relationship to, and taking cognisance of, actually existing conditions.

<sup>45</sup> Davis RMS p 101.

relativises all particular religious expressions, symbols, texts and institutions.<sup>46</sup> Common religious experience relativises expressions, symbols, texts and institutions precisely because the experience that comes before and has priority over them is a common human experience that highlights their contingency. A recurring theme in Davis's work, therefore, is that religious exclusiveness sets uncalled for, and unreasonable, limits on the ability of humans to strive to understand and converse with each other. Pluralism, then is not simply the recognition that the context we live in is pluralist, it is, rather, a positive orientation towards a "... global self consciousness in which we come together in communication and partnership, acknowledging the unity that binds us together despite the persistent plurality of our traditions."<sup>47</sup> It is, in fact, a basic component of the practical way of life to which Davis calls us. As pluralism is of the very essence of politics, in the sense that authentic politics implies communication and partnership and a sympathetic understanding of plurality, so it is the very essence of religion.<sup>48</sup>

Hence, to achieve its own claim to emancipatory efficacy, critical theology and thence the Christian tradition, has not only to recognise but embrace a "... significant pluralism in its knowledge and value claims."<sup>49</sup> Otherwise, as Davis points out "... effective political action of Christians is impeded ... by an inadequate model of the Christian community."<sup>50</sup> There can be no conflict between statements about faith by various traditions because none can be absolute.

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Oppenheim Welcoming the Other: "The philosophical foundations for pluralism in the Works of Charles Davis and Emmanuel Levinas." in TPCT pp 93 - 116

<sup>47</sup> Davis WLWD PP 1 - 2.

<sup>48</sup> Davis TPS p 168.

<sup>49</sup> Davis TPS pp 1-26, and 167 - 169.

<sup>50</sup> Davis WLWD p 2.

The reason that no claim can be absolute comes from Davis's repeated insistence that experience of the transcendent is fundamentally negative. It is negative to the extent that "... the sense of an absence of formulable meaning."<sup>51</sup> Symbol and myth, key components in any religious tradition are likewise 'deabsolutised'<sup>52</sup> because, to the extent that they are legitimate responses to an experience of the transcendent they are not in and of themselves final nor transcendent.<sup>53</sup> From this Davis leads on to a discussion of the "... equivalence of symbols."<sup>54</sup> Symbols that are thus 'de-absolutised' suggest a broad equivalence since they suggest a common recognition of what lies behind them. That is to say, in Davis's terms the symbols themselves have been subverted by the unmediated experience of the absolute.<sup>55</sup> Hence, according to Davis the practices, narratives, symbols and values of a religious tradition can only be secure when engaged in critical discourse with other traditions in the public sphere, otherwise a torpid conservatism will ensue. This discussion concludes that the "... truth and efficacy of one political system does not exclude the truth and efficacy of other, different systems."<sup>56</sup> This is the case because 'truth and efficacy' relates to the appropriate response to the revelation of the ultimate and not a set of propositions about it.

#### 3.1.4. *Privacy and Religious Identity*

We should briefly note at this point that Davis's concern with the public operation of critical theology does not mean that he fails to recognise the private

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<sup>51</sup> Davis RMS p 117.

<sup>52</sup> Davis WLWD Chapter 11, pp 106 – 123.

<sup>53</sup> See the table in Chapter 2 footnote no. 35. This understanding is both a conclusion and an impetus for Davis's conjoined mystical and pragmatic wherein symbol and myth are recognised as relative and contingent.

<sup>54</sup> Davis RMS p 127.

<sup>55</sup> Davis WLWD p 51 and note 109 below.

<sup>56</sup> Davis RMS p 127.



nature of religious experience. It is, rather, that he wishes to reassess the nature of the privacy. Rather than a concern solely with personal values in private life typified by the type of privatised, bourgeois Christianity outlined in the introduction, the social and political aspects of life should be of concern too. The resulting deprivatisation can only be effective if there is a strong connection between "... the rational and the existential, between public knowledge and strategic action on the one hand and private faith and voluntary involvement on the other."<sup>57</sup> For Davis this deprivatisation can only come about with the recognition that the self of the new religious identity, although social, has an interior component that "... coincides with the mystical element in religion."<sup>58</sup> The mystical element is discerned in all religious traditions and further encourages Davis to think of the history of religions as a single history of religion. More importantly, however, is the relationship between the mystical element in religion and faith as the appropriate response to revelation. At one level the mystical element is apolitical but at another it is purely political in that it is the deepest source and ground for authentic political action generating the transformative principle that enables an ethical way of being and acting.

We conclude this section's exploration of the impact of post-orthodoxy on Christian ethics by returning to our definition of Christian ethics. We can see that the impact of post-orthodoxy is profound. We started with Davis's assertion that the message of revelation is a practical way of life. It now appears that this way of life involves the self-aware assimilation of a tradition of reflection, coupled with a

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<sup>57</sup> Davis TPS p 177.

<sup>58</sup> Davis TPS p 180. Davis defines the mystical moment in religion as the experience and subsequent conviction that at its deepest core the reality of my individual self becomes one with ultimate reality.

methodology of pluralism that involves a positive orientation towards a global self-consciousness, and an engagement in the extended narrative history and future orientation of the tradition. What gives substance to this narrative is the pursuit of justice, a constant striving to understand, this is Davis's theological understanding of the discourse model, and the discourse model in turn:

“... by requiring that perspective taking be general and reciprocal, builds a moment of empathy into the procedure of coming to reasoned agreement: each must put him or herself in the place of everyone else in discussing whether a proposed norm is fair at all and this must be done publicly, arguments played out in the individual's consciousness or in the theoreticians mind are no substitute for real discourse.”<sup>59</sup>

A pluralist society rests on communication and aims at consensus and sustains itself by argument. Politics, Davis says, seeks consensus, and “non idolatrous religious faith acknowledges the plurality and equivalence of symbols.”<sup>60</sup> Christian ethics for Davis, then, involves consideration of religious identity, tradition and political action. This realises, in a provisional sense, the promise of critical theology in that it demonstrates how to relate an understanding of the transcendent to human behaviour. Equally, it demonstrates that the appropriate human response to the transcendent as the grounding of Christian ethical reflection in relation to a formal understanding of revelation, for both personal and social activity, in an ethical way of life.

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<sup>59</sup> Hodgson *God in History: Shapes of Freedom*. p 231.

<sup>60</sup> Davis RMS p 127.

In the second part of this chapter we shall continue our investigation into the promise of critical theology. We are now in a position to pull the threads of Davis's thought together and assess its impact on the church generally. We have seen that Davis does not, indeed cannot, abandon the need for a tradition in generating discursive norms and identity. We must now enquire into the shape of the tradition that Davis calls us to. We shall carry out this investigation by relating the implications of Davis's post-orthodoxy for the church. the church is traditionally seen the normative community for Christian reflection action and discourse. As such, it represents the Christian story of Jesus Christ with its prologue in Israel and its sequel in the historic church as the content of self-disclosure of the transcendent.

### 3.2. The Implications of Post-orthodox Christian Ethics for the church

As we noted in the introduction, Davis envisages a valid practical ecclesiology to counter the inadequate model generated by contemporary, privatised, bourgeois Christianity. The practical ecclesiology, that Davis would develop, entails the politicising and democratising of the church such that it reflects the reality of transcendent love, expressed through a symbolic heritage that gives continuity to the various patterns of Christian experience. This continuity will allow the people of God shaped by these patterns of Christian experience to pass from the past to the present and from the present into the future.<sup>61</sup> In this section, therefore, we shall explore the consequences of this practical ecclesiology for the church. We shall do this by, first of all returning to the question of the interior self and authentic political action and consider if Davis's position leads,

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<sup>61</sup> Davis WLWD p 123. We shall return to the question of the relationship between past present and future in Chapter 7 where we shall deal with the ides of anamnestic and proleptic solidarity.

inevitably to leaving the church behind or opens up new options. Finally, we shall explore these options culminating in Davis's interpretation of the church as a community of discourse.

### *3.2.1. Leaving the church behind?*

With a concept of the interior self, as the foundation of a new religious identity, related as Davis suggests to authentic political action, we are forced to consider the possibility that the church as the characteristic community of the Christian tradition must be left behind. As we have seen Davis is certainly wary of the likes of Hauerwas and Milbank who focus, to his mind, too much on the distinctiveness of the church. Although Davis himself is not shy of grounding values in tradition neither MacIntyre's nor Habermas's notions of tradition do justice to the operation of Christian faith. Consequently, we must revisit Davis's understanding of tradition in the interests of uncovering a more appropriate model. To achieve this end we must align Davis's comments on the continuity of revelation with his understanding of the continuity in tradition from the point of view that the directional and irreversible sequence of a tradition rests on the recollection of socially attained stages of development.

Davis suggests that the question of continuity is not simply a problem for understanding religious traditions, it is endemic to all traditions that regard themselves as historically continuous. It is, then, a more general problem that Davis focuses on the question of narrative.<sup>62</sup> He notes that Habermas grants that

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<sup>62</sup> Davis's argument at this point picks up two other contributions to the discussion Hans Michael Baumgartner and A Danto. However, for the purposes of this chapter we shall only pick up on Davis's use of Habermas.

history "... is a retrospective organisation of events and so far the analysis of narrative has clarified the constructivity and retrospectivity of historical consciousness and knowledge."<sup>63</sup> However, this continuity:

"... is based on the unifying force of the vital contexts in which the events acquired their relevance for participants before the historian comes along. He [Habermas] finds the model for this pre-given unity in the identity of the self and the unity of its life-history kept through a series of narrative constructions. History is an objective life context. It is not constructed theoretically for the first time by the historian. The constructions of the historian follow upon and are added to the already formed traditional constructions."<sup>64</sup>

Davis, responding to this insight, has identified two levels of narrative. That is to say, at one level, those produced by the participants in the course of their life practice and, at another level, those produced subsequently by the historian, who chooses an interpretative framework and decides on which events are relevant for inclusion and which are not. Davis says that the former is essentially the realm of human or communicative action. The latter is the realm of theory which, although it has an ineluctable relationship to practice is, nevertheless, secondary to it.<sup>65</sup>

By 'historian' Davis implies here any person dealing with the manipulation of the history of ideas. Thus a philosopher, theologian even a scientist can be understood on one level as an historian.<sup>66</sup> The problem of the historian and of the

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<sup>63</sup> Davis RMS p 104.

<sup>64</sup> Davis RMS p 105.

<sup>65</sup> Davis RMS p 105.

<sup>66</sup> This clarification came from a conversation with Prof. Davis. Cambridge February 1996.

historian's influence on the narrative itself is that the historian is not in the thrall of only pure theory in his or her activities, but is "... within the framework of his own life-practice."<sup>67</sup> Thus, to a degree, the historian's choices generate a narrative of their own and thereby constitute an historical continuity that arises from his or her own life. Inevitably, this impinges on his or her writing and interpretation of historical events. At this point, somewhat surprisingly, Davis draws together Habermas and Alasdair MacIntyre<sup>68</sup> to show that they agree, in principle, on the significance of narrative. This agreement arises from the realisation that all narrative is moral narrative since it requires an evaluative framework "... in which good or bad character helps produce unfortunate or happy outcomes."<sup>69</sup> Clearly, the parallels between this understanding of narrative and action are inescapable. If human action, arising from the living of one's life generates a narrative and all narrative is moral narrative then, it follows that all action is governed by moral considerations. Moral considerations, in turn, arise from communicative action orientated toward consensus in a pluralist environment. This is the framework for authentic political action.

Davis has taken us from the particularity of revelation, through the matter of identity, to the generalities of historical continuity. Thus, he concludes that history is 'a retrospective narrative organisation of events.' Further, the act of organisation of past events has been tied in to practice and under a vision of the future. Two levels of narrative have been distinguished: narratives produced

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<sup>67</sup> Davis RMS p 104.

<sup>68</sup> We shall encounter MacIntyre in much more depth in a later section of the thesis when we shall consider the relationship between his thought and that of Stanley Hauerwas.

<sup>69</sup> Davis RMS p 106.

within the life-practice and narratives constructed subsequently by the historian.<sup>70</sup> As Davis points out, all of this can be said to pertain to revelation, according to his description. Thus, revelation can be understood as not only historical but as history and therefore bound up with tradition. But Davis has already noted the positivity of revelation, and hence of history and tradition which is bound into their particularity. Which brings us back to the question of rationality. If reason is essentially universal, is not "... an appeal to reason an appeal to universal principles to universal criteria and argument?"<sup>71</sup> In which case, an appeal to a particular tradition constitutes an appeal to authority, and hence exclusiveness. Where, and to what then do we appeal when confronted by competing truth claims in theological and ethical discourse? Reason or tradition? That question, however, assumes that either there is absolute distinction between religious traditions, and no shared history, and, as Davis puts it "... when confronted by the plurality of traditions we have no defence against the relativist contention that no issue between conflicting traditions is rationally decidable...",<sup>72</sup> or each religious tradition shares its continuity within the continuity of a broader history of religions. Clearly Davis appeals to the second option as the adequate understanding of the Christian tradition within a broader tradition based on a common core of human experience. Davis suggests, therefore, that the solution to the problem lies in recognising the rationality peculiar to traditions.<sup>73</sup> Echoing the insights of developmental psychology, Davis suggests that this rationality develops in such a way that it passes through unquestioning stages, to reflective stages and continually

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<sup>70</sup> Davis RMS p 108.

<sup>71</sup> Davis RMS p 109.

<sup>72</sup> Davis RMS P 109.

<sup>73</sup> Davis cites MacIntyre at this point who has been exercised by the challenge of relativism. MacIntyre says that "... the relativist challenge [that no issue between conflicting traditions is rationally decidable] can be met by recognising the special kind of rationality proper to traditions. That rationality consists in an openness to tradition." WJWR pp 349 – 369.



reappraises its situation by constructing new narratives to respond to new situations. Thus:

“[T]he tradition avoids repudiation and remains worthy of rational assent as long as it can find within itself the resources to meet new situations and questions with sufficient inventiveness for the reformulation and revaluation of its authoritative texts and beliefs.”<sup>74</sup>

This rational assent must be tied into the extended history of the tradition as well as the particularity of the historical context within the broader tradition of the history of religion. This point is central to Davis’s critical ecclesiology.

This self-reflective dynamic, Davis claims, typifies the Christian tradition from the point of view of the critical theologian. Its history is a conflict of interpretations of context, of sources, of its relationship to revelation, whose continuity is achieved by narrative, the narrative of the life-world. This means that, for the critical theologian, narrative represents two related but distinguishable dynamics. That is to say, narrative represents both an internal conversation and an external engagement with society and culture. The internal conversation, at times painfully slow, at times convoluted and problematic, is still communicative action. In the final analysis revelation, history and narrative tradition do not present a problem for Davis, rather they provide the grounding of identity and hence authentic political action.

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<sup>74</sup> Davis RMS p 109.

Thus, Davis is putting forward a powerful challenge to the church.<sup>75</sup> The church has an impressive infrastructure for the facilitation of true communication if only the will was there. The will is not there because the church has not learned the lessons of the past, of its tradition. This in turn impinges on its vision of the future. As Davis says:

“[A] vision empowers. If it does not it remains a weak dream. So a vision has to have substantive content ... a content that must be subject to critique. But what then is the difference between a straight forward description and analysis of a situation and an empowering vision of the same situation? It ... is the imagining of alternatives ... Empowered by the vision we explore new possibilities.”<sup>76</sup>

Empowered by the vision of communicative rationality, Davis is led to explore new possibilities for the church. These new possibilities call for, on the one hand, abandoning the oppressive, hierarchical, totalising church which Davis feels is inimical to liberation and hence the kingdom of God. On the other hand there is the possibility of an alternative understanding of the church as a community of discourse, which is nevertheless loyal to its tradition; that is the vision to which Davis calls us.

Finally we return to an earlier theme of Davis's. He understands that society is the product of free human agency in freedom governed by rationality.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The term Church here does not refer to any particular denomination. Although Davis is generally considered to be a Roman Catholic theologian he sees himself, as it were, addressing people of good will in whatever denomination, religious tradition or none to which they see themselves belonging. Conversation with Prof. Davis Edinburgh November 1996.

<sup>76</sup> Davis “The End of Socialism?” in Centre for Theology and Public Issues Occasional Paper no 32 *After Socialism? The Future of Radical Christianity*. Edinburgh 1994 pp 3-10.

<sup>77</sup> Davis RMS p 124 and Chapter 1.

The ongoing construction of this society is a political endeavour. Davis, as we have seen, does not claim any special place for religion “...which should not stand apart from our secular lives as a distinct realm of thought or action. There is no proper or specific religious language precisely because religion is not a specifically distinct realm of meaning or culture.”<sup>78</sup> Hence, Davis can assert that the church too is sphere of human social practice governed by rationality. Thus, since the religious identity that Davis has developed is broadly the same as the social, it should come as no surprise to realise that religious and political action should not be differentiated either. Indeed we have already seen Davis make claims for a cognitive political contribution from religion in that it can provide the transcendent foundation needed for sustained communication. Further to this, religion can reasonably be expected to keep conversations going by refusing to absolutise any finite order.<sup>79</sup> Davis talks of global self-consciousness which seems to presuppose the formation of a universal social order, which, as universal, will not be distinctively, nor exclusively Christian.<sup>80</sup> More significantly, Davis sees the formation of this universal social order as the mission of the Christian tradition. The Christian tradition formulated as sharing a single history and not tied to the fixed contents of one tradition and then articulated in critical theology, according to Davis, presents us with a means of salvaging conversations precisely because it refuses to delineate differentiated spheres of political, theological and religious activity.

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<sup>78</sup> Davis RMS p 118.

<sup>79</sup> Davis RMS p 126.

<sup>80</sup> Davis WLWD p 2.

However, this leaves us with a related question and the topic of our next section: given the new religious identity that Davis has established, how far can one go away from the claims of one's own religious tradition while still attempting to ground values in that tradition? In other words, what sort of community of faith would critical theology as an expression of a community of discourse give us? Davis contends that what guarantees the basic continuity of a community is the narrative of the life world, the continual working out of just outcomes; the praxis of a community of discourse. It is this that has primacy over the contents and norms of any one tradition or any permanent collective body. For Davis, it presupposes a universal community, transcending all social distinctions. the church, as it stands, has a huge infrastructure that could if the will was there facilitate true communication. the church did not adequately respond to the challenge of the critical public as it developed. Thus, the church without the will to facilitate communicative action is, in fact, an impediment to authentic political action.<sup>81</sup> The institutional church must, therefore, be re-formed rather than left behind. Davis suggests that the best way to reform the church is to begin to conceive of it as a community of discourse.

### 3.2.2. *The Church as Community of Discourse*

That the church should be conceived of as a community of discourse is a provocative and important claim. Clearly, first and foremost, the church for Davis is a community of faith formed through the first order of narrative mentioned above, that is life practised in response to the divine initiative. However, when it

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<sup>81</sup> For Davis, the institutional church as the locus of authentic [Christian] political action is possibly necessary but certainly not sufficient. It is necessary insofar as it can be constructed as a community of discourse. Its dogmas and fixed contents fall into the second level of narrative. However, the continuity of the Christian tradition is achieved by the narrative that originates at the first level.

comes to the second level of narrative, the theoretical, we reach the level of doctrine and orthodoxy. This level is essential for ordering a community, even in the most 'hands-off' manner. If, however, Davis's claims for reformation based on the insights of critical theology are to succeed, then he has to avoid falling back into a hierarchy of doctrine and orthodoxy. This is precisely where the model of a community of discourse reflects, for Davis, an accurate representation of the way the church can and should be. To develop this idea, however, we must explore the conceptual framework that Davis deploys in coming to this conclusion.<sup>82</sup>

The essence of Davis's conceptual framework rests on two assertions. The first assertion is that a religious tradition, as we have seen, forms a dynamic process of historical development and modification. The second assertion is that, just as the history of religions is a history made up of constituent elements, contributing to the history of religion, so Christianity is not simply a unitary phenomenon. It is, rather, a relation of four distinct but related typological models, effectively generating a complex symbol system that allows for the mediation and interpretation of human existence.

With these assertions in mind, Davis proceeds to identify four models of the Christian tradition. He identifies the Mythical, the Pragmatic, the Visionary and the Mystical models of Christianity.<sup>83</sup> These four models represent the character of the Christian tradition as the "...coexistence of and successive

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<sup>82</sup> For this analysis we shall rely extensively on an exploration of WLWD. See also Chapter 2 of this thesis, footnote 34.

<sup>83</sup> Davis WLWD Ch 2. pp 13 – 24.

dominance of different symbol systems, partly complementary, partly in conflict.”<sup>84</sup> Further, the models can be understood to represent epochs in the history of Christianity. Therefore, insofar as any model coincides with an era in Christian history and becomes dominant, it describes crudely a sequential relationship that mirrors the move from pre-modern to modern.<sup>85</sup> That is not to say, however, that they represent accurately stages in the development of the Christian tradition. That says Davis would be an oversimplification of the complexities of history. Rather they represent concern with “...the different possibilities available to the religious imagination as it works religious data into an overall symbol system.”<sup>86</sup> The religious data to which he refers, relates to the human experience of response to “... contradictory features ... such as unmerited suffering on the one hand and the joyful goodness of life on the other.”<sup>87</sup> Davis, not content with describing the four models, wishes to explore their relative merits in light of both Christianity and of humanity at large in their contemporary social, cultural and political context.

Mythical Christianity,<sup>88</sup> has been and is the dominant model and is in many ways the benchmark for Davis. He equates it with the presentation of a normative, total order. It presents, he says, “... a comprehensive account of the order of the world, of society and of the nature and destiny of the individual.”<sup>89</sup> Its influence rests precisely on this comprehensive presentation. Typically, the mythical model is based on a literal and historical reading of scripture and the Christian story is

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<sup>84</sup> Davis WLWD p 12 and p 14

<sup>85</sup> Davis WLWD p 14.

<sup>86</sup> Davis WLWD p 14.

<sup>87</sup> Davis WLWD p 12.

<sup>88</sup> Davis WLWD Ch 3 p 25 – 34.

<sup>89</sup> Davis WLWD p 25.

thence understood to relate directly to the human condition. Language, even metaphorical language, is held to be directly related to reality, thus allowing us to uncover patterns of relationship within the world. The Bible, therefore, represents a realistic account of salvation history. As such, the individual is related to a greater cosmic order, from the creation of the world, through the incarnation in Christ to the consummation of the eschaton.

Although, the parallels with pre-modern world-views are clear, Davis maintains that this is not the most primitive model (this distinction is held by the Visionary model). Rather it represents the formalisation of a world-view broadly parallel with the integration of Christianity into the Roman Empire.<sup>90</sup> This integration gave rise to the patristic vision of the church, with its rituals and sacraments being part of a divinely ordered world history. We have mentioned above the development of myth into dogma, as salvation and world history coalesced.

“In its conception of a normative order as prior to human intelligence and creativity, in its stress upon tradition and the church as indispensable bearers of revealed knowledge and value, and in its view of language as no mere external tool but as reflecting the patterning of reality, the mythical type of the Christian religion is inevitably conservative in its attitude to social reality and history.”<sup>91</sup>

The effect of such conservative orientation, Davis claims, was an elaborate doctrinal scheme that had become separated from its roots in the experiences of

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<sup>90</sup> Davis WLWD p 31.

<sup>91</sup> Davis WLWD p 31.



suffering, guilt and death. Dogma had lost contact with genuine human experience. The consequence, Davis suggests, was an inability to interpret this experience. Subsequently, there have been a number of attempts to mediate the content of this model to the contemporary world while leaving the form unchanged. Broadly speaking Davis characterises these attempts as liberal.<sup>92</sup> He argues that such liberal efforts are simply implausible. Even notable events such as the Second Vatican Council are characterised as fundamentally conservative insofar as they attempt “... continuance with the mythical version of the Christian religion.”<sup>93</sup> The church according to this model, can make no constructive contribution to the contemporary crises of faith. The problem is that the myth cannot be sustained much longer in the face of a “... situation that cannot be met by an orderly development of traditional categories, but which demands something radically new...”<sup>94</sup> Myth, says Davis, must relate to the deepest challenges of human existence if it is to continue as myth and not devolve into folklore. Hence Davis calls for a radical new development within Christianity.

Having recognised and noted the problems intrinsic to the mythical model, Davis turns his attention to what he calls the Pragmatic model.<sup>95</sup> Pragmatic Christianity is to be understood initially as a response to or even a derivative of the mythical model.<sup>96</sup> Within the pragmatic model the Christian story no longer

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<sup>92</sup> Davis links this type of mediation to Drey and Möhler on the Catholic side and Schleiermacher and his descendents on the Protestant side. Curiously, according to Davis’s argument, because of their adherence to the basic form of the Mythical model these theologians though considered liberal were actually engaged in a profoundly conservative project. The same can be said of Lonergan according to Davis in WLWD p 63 – 64.

<sup>93</sup> Davis WLWD p 33.

<sup>94</sup> Davis WLWD p 34.

<sup>95</sup> Davis WLWD Chapter 4 pp 35 – 45.

<sup>96</sup> Davis WLWD p 35.

functions as a complete account of the cosmic order. Neither does it offer an objective system of salvation. Instead, the pragmatic model splits the whole into its constituent components and submits each to critical analysis as to their ability to further the cause of human moral striving.<sup>97</sup> The Christian religion is seen primarily as a practical way of life. The focus falls on the individual in relationship to God rather than upon the church as an organising community. This relationship with God is interpreted in terms of the commandment to love God and one's neighbour. Consequently there is a simultaneous internalisation of religion coupled to a public manifestation of its moral practice. The church was refashioned so that it "... no longer stood on the side of the State as an institution of power but belonged as a social system to the bourgeois public sphere."<sup>98</sup>

"Practice in this type of religion is no longer conformity to an objective system but fully personal, moral action, rooted in the explicit belief and the conscious commitment of the individual."<sup>99</sup>

This type of Christianity, Davis suggests, has its roots in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century humanistic Renaissance.<sup>100</sup> As a result it coexisted with the high medieval expression of the mythical model, paving the way for the reformation and the high Renaissance of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries,<sup>101</sup> and contributing to the fragmentation of the mythical model. A major feature of the development of pragmatic

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<sup>97</sup> Davis WLWD p 35.

<sup>98</sup> Davis WLWD p 42. To recap, Davis is using a Habermasian term here. Bourgeois public sphere translates from Habermas as the sphere of private people formed into a public. This in turn reflects to the development of philosophies of consciousness from Descartes throughout the Enlightenment.

<sup>99</sup> Davis WLWD p 36.

<sup>100</sup> Davis WLWD p 35.

<sup>101</sup> Davis WLWD pp 37 – 38.

Christianity is a de-emphasis of the Christian story, with its prologue in Israel and working out in the church, and the consequent focus on tradition. Jesus becomes epitomised as a moral teacher and exemplar. As a result it is the contention of Pragmatic Christianity that the "...specifically Christian meanings lay not in his life as a story but in the content of his teaching and the moral goodness of his actions."<sup>102</sup> His crucifixion and death, therefore, represent the ultimate and tragic nature of human existence. No longer emphasising an eschatological system of salvation, religion has become a philosophy of life wherein reason and doctrine are orientated towards illuminating the ethical aspect of human existence.<sup>103</sup>

From his analysis of the mythical and the pragmatic models of religion Davis moves on to the visionary<sup>104</sup> model which, he suggests, concerns itself with aspects of human experience which the other two do not.<sup>105</sup> In particular, Davis is concerned that the mythical and pragmatic models are inadequate in addressing "...the needs of the oppressed and the marginal elements in human society for deliverance and integration."<sup>106</sup> We can see that visionary Christianity also bears a close relationship to mythical Christianity, particularly to the internal fragmentation of the mythical model. Davis describes the distinguishing feature of visionary Christianity as the distinction it draws between two worlds. That is to say, it distinguishes between a new world which will replace the old.<sup>107</sup> In this model, the Christian story emphasises the death and resurrection of Jesus as that of a romanticised "... victorious hero, successfully completing his quest and

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<sup>102</sup> Davis WLWD pp 38 – 40.

<sup>103</sup> Davis WLWD pp 44 – 45.

<sup>104</sup> Davis WLWD pp 46 – 50.

<sup>105</sup> Davis WLWD p 46.

<sup>106</sup> Davis WLWD p 46.

<sup>107</sup> Davis WLWD pp 46 – 47.

overcoming the forces of evil.”<sup>108</sup> This model represents a social and ethical radicalism that rejects the norms of this world in favour of a commitment to the coming of the kingdom of God on earth. Davis maintains that this model reflects the primitive form of Christianity, which began as “...visionary message or *kerygma*, offering apocalyptic hope in a new order.”<sup>109</sup> Notably Davis maintains that visionary Christianity has never been wholly absent from the matrix of pragmatic and mythical Christianity, although it may only have survived on the very fringes. In contemporary Christianity, however, the visionary model has moved back towards the centre. Paradoxically, this is in the guise of two apparently opposed forms: fundamentalism and liberation theology.

Finally, Davis turns his attention to mystical Christianity.<sup>110</sup> He characterises this as the “... unmediated experience or apprehension of ... the Godhead or Ultimate.”<sup>111</sup> He claims, further, that this is an experience of mediated immediacy whereby the symbols and resources of the Christian tradition provide transparent and dispensable means to this experience. The relationship between mystical Christianity and the mainstream of the Christian religion has always been fraught and ambiguous, since it implies that the mediating elements are not important in themselves. Davis maintains, therefore that mystical Christianity has, as we have mentioned already, provided an implicit critique of the ontological pretensions of the mythical Christianity. The epistemological basis for mystical Christianity rests on the inadequacy of any and all language to apprehend the meaning of the ultimate. Hence there is some continuity with pragmatic

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<sup>108</sup> Davis WLWD p 47.

<sup>109</sup> Davis WLWD p 49.

<sup>110</sup> Davis WLWD pp 51 – 54.

<sup>111</sup> Davis WLWD p 51.

Christianity, insofar as both types consider the dogmatic content of the mythical type to be unimportant.<sup>112</sup>

These descriptions form for Davis a platform from which he can embark upon his normative project. This normative project is to discern what Christianity can become for us today.<sup>113</sup> As Davis says "... Christianity is a dynamic reality, always changing. ... The appraisal of the past and of the present to uncover the resources that can lead us into the future."<sup>114</sup> To this end Davis embarks on a critical appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the four models described above. However, we must acknowledge Davis's own agenda in that the interpretation of Christianity to which he leans and to which "... he is reaching through the critical discussion of the four models of Christian religion belongs by its fundamental principle or generative idea to the second model or type."<sup>115</sup> That is to say, and as we have seen, Davis's interests lie within the Pragmatic model of Christianity. That Davis has an explicit agenda does not diminish the weight of his insight, but it does mean that we need to pause for a moment to make some critical observations.

Davis concedes that the inheritance of pragmatic Christianity, can best be described as a mixed blessing.<sup>116</sup> On the positive side the pragmatic inheritance

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<sup>112</sup> At this point we should mention the four strands of political action associated with each type. That is to say Sacrament, ritual and moral action in this world, passive expectation/revolutionary action and withdrawal from action into passive contemplation. Davis WLWD p 54 see Chapter 2 note 34.

<sup>113</sup> Davis WLWD p 55.

<sup>114</sup> Davis WLWD p 55.

<sup>115</sup> Davis WLWD p 78.

<sup>116</sup> Davis WLWD pp 78 – 94.

articulates the Christian tradition as a practical way of life, understood as a response to revelation of divine love. As we have seen, for Davis this is the locus of Christianity's authentic religious and, therefore, political content. On the negative side, however, pragmatic Christianity has presented two flaws. The first is its tendency to abrogate the transcendent core in terms of which Christian practice has articulated its own vision. Secondly, it has become bound to a language that is essentially instrumental and is, therefore, weakened in its efforts to convey the symbolic richness of the Christian heritage that serves its practical aim. On both of these points, however, Davis regards the mystical model as providing an effective counter balance to these negative dynamics. This works insofar as the mystical model provides a means of recovering a sense of the transcendent while providing an insight into the inadequacy of all language in the expression of the transcendent. In turn, Davis suggests, this would generate a more pluralistic and tolerant view of humanity's diverse religious heritage.<sup>117</sup>

Davis goes on to argue that, whenever the transcendence of "... Christian experience has been recognised, the indispensable function of tradition and community re-emerges, even after the rejection of a doctrinalized form of tradition and of an absolutist form of Church authority."<sup>118</sup> Davis's assertions about the importance of this tradition, therefore, leads us to make some provisional conclusions as to the shape of the community of faith that Davis envisages. We can see that such a community as Davis would lead us to, can have its roots in divine

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<sup>117</sup> Davis WLWD pp 95 – 97.

<sup>118</sup> Davis WLWD p 80.

revelation.<sup>119</sup> The result of comprehending this revelation is a post-conventional, universalistic religious identity, both personal and social, not tied to the fixed contents and norms of any one tradition nor to any permanent collective body, which will alone correspond to the present level of human social development and which will facilitate authentic political action. Authentic political action comes about from a practical way of life that revolves around voluntary association in the public sphere. Religion is institutionalised in the church, subject to and the subject of social practice and organisation. The process of communication that Davis invokes as the governing principle for his democratised church coincides with Habermas's communicative action. Thus we can say that the impact of Davis's critical theology on the church is the realisation of the inheritance of a mystical-pragmatic Christianity and the subordination of the mythical-visionary legacy. This demands, in the final analysis, a reconfiguration of the church as a community of discourse providing the transcendent foundation for sustained communication among human beings, despite their differences.

### 3.3. Conclusion

In this chapter we have been engaged in assessing the promise of critical theology. We have seen that critical theology can exercise a profound influence on Christian ethics and thence on the church, understood as an appropriate response to revelation. By gaining a proper understanding of revelation we were able to gauge the correct relationship between reason and tradition in Davis's thought. The promise of critical theology, then, lies in the realisation of a theology capable of redressing the excesses of modernity at the same time as making critical

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<sup>119</sup> Davis's idea of revelation is one that relies on the notion of divine immanence. It is the ongoing story of conflict and resolution resulting from human experience. It involves scripture as a way of making some sense of this experience.



statements in the public sphere, thus allowing for authentic political action. Part fulfilment of the promise of critical theology is the politicising of the church. Politicising, or democratising the church provides the first step toward a valid practical ecclesiology, embodying the appropriate response to revelation is to understand Christianity as offering an ethical way of life wherein theory and praxis are realigned, to provide a way of being and acting.

It is clear, however, that from Davis's argument the politicising of the church requires a complete rethinking of what tradition, identity and praxis mean. The result of this rethinking tends toward reforming rather than abandoning the church. As such two observations must be made. First of all, we must acknowledge Davis's basically liberal agenda. He clearly embraces the mystical-pragmatic model of religion over and against the mythical-visionary. That the divisions should be thus made rather than say visionary-pragmatic or mythical-mystical reflects the insights of critical theology. That is to say, reflects a liberalism that is identifiable by "... its refusal of any dogmatic claim to final, immutable teaching."<sup>120</sup> This means, inevitably a subordination of dogmatism from either the Christian Right or Left.<sup>121</sup> The Christian Right is typically, wary of any creative response to new challenges, particularly in the destructive features of modern rationality. Hence it tends to fundamentalism, stressing formal systems technical language, narrowly conceived empirical verification and the manipulative instrumental use of reason. The Christian left, on the other hand, "... runs the risk of Marxistlike dogmatism in supposing that there is some radical, clearly

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<sup>120</sup> Davis WLWD p 121.

<sup>121</sup> The terms Christian Right and Left are used by Davis in WLWD basically to denote Christian conservatism and Christian liberalism.

delineated, once-for-all solution to the ills of human society.”<sup>122</sup> Davis’s own liberal agenda is more political commitment to a tradition of tolerance and pluralism than theological. Hence it is the ground for breaking the conservative/liberal deadlock in Christian discourse.

This brings us to the second point that must be made, how can a non dogmatic interpretation of the Christian faith be combined with a tireless living out of the demands of Christian love? The point Davis makes is that common action, the political action that is our concern, does not necessarily rely on prior agreement on a set of formulated doctrines.<sup>123</sup> It can, however, be based upon a process of communication. He says:

“This [process of communication], if made continuous, can keep creating afresh a common understanding that goes beyond any previously reached agreement, providing thus the flexibility required for action and doing justice to the unity of theory and practice.”<sup>124</sup>

Hence Davis’s call for a politicised, reformed church. It is reformed away from the prior agreement of dogma towards a process of communication. In terms of shape, it represents the mystical-pragmatic model. It is thus conceived of as a community of discourse. One question remains, however, and will be the dealt with in Chapter 6. That is to say, while Davis’s church might be conceived of as a

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<sup>122</sup> Davis WLWD p 121. Davis is fortunately careful to point out that the critique of Western capitalist society from the left is, nevertheless well founded. He does however provide the caveat that in providing such a critique one does not automatically supply a ready made solution to the problems.

<sup>123</sup> Davis WLWD p 121 – 122. He suggests further that dogmatic bases tend to split under pressure of action and create disputing factions, such as the Christian Right and Left

<sup>124</sup> Davis WLWD p 122.

community of discourse, does the community of discourse fulfil the criteria of ecclesiality?

### 3.4. Summary

In this chapter we have analysed the promise of critical theology with reference to Christian ethics and the church. We have seen that this analysis raises questions of religious and social identity, plurality, rationality and the shape and scope of tradition. In the second part of the chapter we focused on the scope and the nature of the Christian tradition and the impact of critical theology on it. This focused our attention on religious identity as the ground for political action. We asked whether Davis's post-orthodoxy leaves the church behind or causes us to rethink. It became apparent that the latter was the case. Hence, noting and defining Davis's liberal agenda we suggested that he espoused creative disaffiliation rather than abandonment. Creative disaffiliation leads to reformation and reformation means, for Davis, conceiving the church as a community of discourse.

Charles Davis's Critical Theology and Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesial Ethics:  
Discourse and Character and the Church's Political Action

## Section 3

Stanley Hauerwas and The Promise of Ecclesial Ethics

## **Chapter 4. Stanley Hauerwas's 'Post-liberal' Ecclesial Ethics**

In the previous two chapters of the thesis I examined the critical theology of Charles Davis. We saw that Davis took seriously the problems of modernity, engaging with them head on. In this engagement Davis found an ally in Jürgen Habermas and his version of discourse ethics. We found that the methodology and insights of discourse ethics provided, for Davis, an important resource upon which to build what he calls critical theology which confronted and dealt with the questions generated up by the contemporary political, social and economic concerns of late modernity more effectively than traditional theology managed to do. In so doing Davis led us, as it were, into the cultural desert of modernity wherein religion scarcely flourishes.

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter we turn to a second theological response to similar questions.<sup>1</sup> This response is found in the work of Stanley Hauerwas. As we saw in Chapter 1, and by way of introducing Hauerwas's work to the thesis, we made some preliminary comments and observations about his understanding of the content and context of his work, thus showing that it is a strong challenge to Davis. In Chapter 1, I placed Hauerwas in relation to the particular concerns of Alasdair MacIntyre and thus in the broader area of, so called, communitarian thought. Having provisionally identified Hauerwas's theology as 'communitarian', by association with his philosophical antecedent, I will now examine, more

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<sup>1</sup> I noted in the introduction the concerns that Hauerwas and Davis share. In Chapter 6 I will reassess these concerns and comment upon them in more detail.

closely, Hauerwas's work and the promise of ecclesial ethics. This promise is that authentic political action should, in the end, not make the world just but make the world the world. That is to say, authentic political action represents the tactical deployment of the art of maintaining a good society subject to the witness of the peaceable kingdom. In the final analysis, for Hauerwas, the art of maintaining a good society represents the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common.<sup>2</sup> I will continue to explore this promise in more depth in Chapter 5. In the meantime we have to concern ourselves with an exposition of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.

Hauerwas, along with Alasdair MacIntyre,<sup>3</sup> suggests that:

“... [t]his is not the first time that ethics has been fashionable. And history suggests that in those periods when a social order becomes uneasy and even alarmed by the weakening of the moral bonds and the poverty of its moral inheritance and turns for aid to the moral philosopher or the theologian, it may not find these disciplines flourishing in such a way as to be able to make available the kind of moral reflection and theory which the culture actually needs.”<sup>4</sup>

The reason for the malaise in the social order is that we live in an age of relativism and competing truth claims, wherein various groups and communities are vying for attention. When the claims of these groups come into conflict then at the point of effecting radical change through political action, “... we will not all share common intuitions...one needs some account of the nature of our society and the character of moral judgements - one needs, in short, something that looks very like

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<sup>2</sup> Hauerwas *Epilogue* p 25.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre (eds.) *Revisions: Changing perspectives in Moral Philosophy* 1983. University of Notre Dame Press. Indiana

<sup>4</sup> This quote comes from the preface to *Revisions*.

a theory.”<sup>5</sup> There has to be, therefore, some degree of globalised discourse to provide a platform for any kind of action. Hauerwas, however, opposes any form of globalised discourse since no system or theory can give a complete picture and this is precisely because there is no neutral vantage point. Hauerwas offers us, rather, an understanding of moral discourse rooted in smaller scale narrative traditions, which nurture character and virtue and thus foster authentic political action.

Hauerwas, therefore, stands against ‘liberal’ faith and theology that seeks to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age of modernity. To this end, Hauerwas responds to the contemporary situation with a constructive programme of ecclesial or church ethics presenting the church as precisely that community which offers the necessary context for coherent ethical discourse. It is his often stated, almost axiomatic, claim that the church should not have a social ethic, rather it is a social ethic.<sup>6</sup> This church, he claims, is faithful to the scriptures and imparts its message to the social order rather than complying with the social order. It is not a community that is constituted simply as a survival tactic for the modern world helping Caesar keep society in good working order.<sup>7</sup> Hence, he envisages the church as the community of faith which attempts to integrate Christology and social ethics, breaking down the dichotomy of agent and act and imbuing social ethics with virtues of self-discovery.<sup>8</sup> Hauerwas further asserts that Christian ethics in particular is a direct challenge to the theories of autonomy upon which liberal theologies and theories like those of Davis and Habermas are based. He insists further on the exclusivity and distinctiveness of the church from the world,

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<sup>5</sup>W. Placher *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation*. 1989 Louisville p 92.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance, CET pp 133 – 137 & 148, and RA pp 112 – 143.

<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon *The Christian Century* January 30th 1985 101 no. pages 98ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas COC p 91.



coupled with the necessity of renouncing the liberal priority of the self. Moreover, he wants to assert and acknowledgement that all that is good comes to us not as a right but as a gift mediated through the narrative community of faith that is the church.<sup>9</sup>

This agenda places Hauerwas, ostensibly, on the opposite pole from Davis. We shall see, however, very similar themes and concerns arise as appeared in our investigation of Davis's critical theology, and these must be addressed in this investigation. The concerns are the nature and task of theology, questions of social and religious identity, political action and plurality and the implications of these themes for the church. Where Davis's critical theology leads us into the desert, this investigation will lead us into the ghetto. Because Hauerwas conceives of the church, or community of faith, as a counter-cultural enclave we have no option, it appears, but to be at best circumspect about, or at worst withdraw from the sort of cultural involvement encouraged by Davis.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the task in this chapter is to analyse the work of Stanley Hauerwas in order to assess the claim that Hauerwas, on his own, leaves us in an ecclesial ghetto. This shall be done by locating Hauerwas's work in the broad spectrum of current ethical thinking but most precisely in relation to Alasdair MacIntyre.<sup>11</sup> This, in turn, will raise questions concerning the nature and task of theology with

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. 1983. University of Notre Dame Press. Indiana.

<sup>10</sup> This is generally the thrust of *Resident Aliens: Life in The Christian Colony*. 1989 Abingdon Nashville (co-authored with William Willimon). In this book Hauerwas argues that the church has a mission of its own. Its task is to be the church or a community of faith with a vision and story which is radically different and which, in turn, tends to a different way of life.

<sup>11</sup> In developing his ideas Hauerwas drew from Iris Murdoch's "Vision and Choice in Morality." in Ian T. Ramsey ed. *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*. 1966 SCM Press London. pp 181-218. In this article Murdoch brought the Platonic theme of the contemplation of the good back into the contemporary discussion of morality. Hauerwas went a step further and argued that the vision that shapes the moral life of Christians is not just the timeless contemplation of beauty or goodness but a *narrative* vision. This narrative vision is a sense of the continuing Christian story.

implications for the church, for identity and political action. We shall endeavour, therefore, to explore Hauerwas's intellectual relationship to MacIntyre and his use of MacIntyre as a philosophical ally and resource for his ecclesial ethics, concentrating on the two main areas of virtue and religion. This will provide the basis for a final two-part, in-depth analysis of Hauerwas's response to the nature and task of theology in respect to ecclesial ethics and thence the church.

#### 4.2. Stanley Hauerwas's Relationship to MacIntyre and Virtue Ethics

Stanley Hauerwas's intellectual relationship to Alasdair MacIntyre is an intimate but critical one. Every one of Hauerwas's books is peppered with references to MacIntyre's work that provides for him a substantial philosophical basis from which to justify his theological claims.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see they both share a profound suspicion of the standard account of moral reasoning and crave a return to substantive rationality to provide the basis for coherent, tradition-dependent moral reasoning.<sup>13</sup> In this section we shall examine the development of Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics in relation to MacIntyre's virtue ethics. To understand fully Hauerwas's position it is necessary to trace the development of his thought from the background of Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics. Where Jürgen Habermas concerned himself with the redemption of the lifeworld in the interests of justice, MacIntyre is interested in recovering the notion of virtue in public discourse. Like Habermas, MacIntyre's thoughts on this theme are wide-ranging. Unlike Habermas, however, his impact upon theology has been much more immediate. This is principally because of his call for a return to the tradition of moral discourse which runs from Aristotle to Aquinas. In this section we shall examine Hauerwas's reading of MacIntyre by highlighting the main areas of

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<sup>12</sup> Curiously, Hauerwas theological claims, if he were to be consistent, shouldn't really need justification as we shall see in the next chapter.

<sup>13</sup> The "standard account" is Hauerwas's shorthand for modern liberal ethical discourse TT p 15 – 39.

connection. Hence we shall highlight, in turn, MacIntyre's efforts to return to substantive rationality in his virtue ethics following on from his conceptualisation of modernity; MacIntyre's concern with virtue and its relation to tradition and practice; and MacIntyre's position as regards the viability of theology. Finally, from this exposition, we shall relate the development of Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.

#### 4.2.1 Hauerwas's Debt to MacIntyre and Virtue Ethics

In this section I will outline MacIntyre's virtue ethics. In so doing I will establish the extent of Hauerwas's debt to MacIntyre. MacIntyre's conception of modern society, and one with which Hauerwas agrees,<sup>14</sup> is of a random collection of fragments with no generally acceptable criteria for the resolution of moral disputes and conflicts.<sup>15</sup> The lack of such generally acceptable criteria means that:

“The inability of philosophers to reach agreement is notorious. And this inability extends to disagreement over how to characterise their disagreements and as to which of their disagreements are central to their discipline and which peripheral ... Contemporary moral philosophy is likely to suffer even more from the endemic inability to agree than are such other subdisciplines as logic or epistemology; for differing standpoints within moral philosophy have always been closely related to differing moral standpoints.”<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the notion of differing moral standpoints is at the very heart of MacIntyre's and, therefore, Hauerwas's concern. On this matter, since he does not develop a theory of society, culture or modernity he relies on MacIntyre's insights.

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<sup>14</sup> In this section it would be neither feasible, nor desirable to indicate every single occasion on which MacIntyre is cited by Hauerwas, mostly because the references come in footnotes and end notes. For instance this statement can be corroborated from the introduction to *Revisions*, AC notes to Chapter 4 pp 179 – 183, DFTF notes to the introduction p 187 – 201. Therefore unless a direct quotation or citation is necessary the rest of this section will represent a presentation of the manner in which Hauerwas reads MacIntyre

<sup>15</sup> MacIntyre AV p 104.

<sup>16</sup> Hauerwas and MacIntyre, *Revisions* p 2 –3.

The differing moral standpoints suggest to MacIntyre moral fragments, which we manipulate with less than resounding success, are the surviving vestigial traces of substantive moral perspectives that were once ensconced within various traditions and practices which have been discredited by modernity. That is to say, that the metaphysical presuppositions, which are to be traced in modernity, are at odds with the metaphysical presuppositions of these earlier traditions and practices. For instance, deontological and teleological ethics betray an implicit debt to divine command or divine law ethics or rest upon some eschatological understanding of reward and punishment. Such debts cannot be redeemed in modernity, hence the problem. Without reference to the earlier traditions we simply manipulate ethical fragments. MacIntyre's contention, however, is that by relocating the fragments of moral discourse in the traditions from whence they have come we might rescue moral philosophical discourse and provide the sort of reflection and theory which the culture actually needs.

Put simply, MacIntyre's claim is that even the procedural notions of rationality developed by the likes of Habermas require more significant substantive foundations than can be permitted under the terms of the notion itself. MacIntyre, in an attempt to ground his call to substantive reasoning, calls for a return to the tradition of enquiry which runs from Plato, through Aristotle to Aquinas.<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre begins this process with a disquieting suggestion "... we possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality."<sup>18</sup> Lack of comprehension leads to a loss of coherence. Coherence can be regained only by the rediscovery of

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre AV p 2.

philosophical reflection on the virtues, discarded in modern thought. MacIntyre says further that:

“... [m]oral enquiry moves towards arriving at theoretical and practical conclusions about [particular] virtues. But ... one cannot learn how to move towards such conclusions without first having acquired some at least of those same virtues about which one is enquiring and without therefore having first been able to identify which virtues they are and, to at least some minimal extent, what makes these particular habits virtues.”<sup>19</sup>

This insight on MacIntyre's part generates a paradox wherein, by understanding moral enquiry as a craft, one has to have reached certain conclusions even to be able to become the sort of person that can engage in the sort of enquiry that can reach sound conclusions.<sup>20</sup> This paradox must be addressed and MacIntyre does so by suggesting the need for a teacher to enable one to realise the potential for moving towards the necessary theoretical and practical conclusions that virtue requires. The authority of the teacher rests on his or her place within the tradition of the practices of that craft, while the tradition itself has a didactic aspect. Hence the craft, of architecture or moral enquiry, has a component of rational teaching authority internal to the practice of the craft itself.<sup>21</sup> In order to understand fully MacIntyre's position, we must examine what he means by practice, virtue and

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<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre TRV p 63.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre TRV p 63 “How is the threat of this paradox – recognisably a version of that posed at the outset of by Plato in the *Meno* about learning in general - to be ... met? The answer is in part suggested by the *Meno*: unless we already have within ourselves the potentiality for moving towards and achieving the relevant theoretical and practical conclusions we shall be unable to learn.”

<sup>21</sup> Hauerwas points out that it is one of the fallacies of modern liberal education that we teach students to be able to think and make up their own mind. “What must be said is that most students in our society do not have minds well enough trained to be able to think – period. A central pedagogical task is to tell students that they do not yet have minds worth making up.” AC p 98. See also DFTF p 5.

tradition. We begin with practices for it is in the shared practices of a tradition that substantive concepts of reason are born.

Common human social practices give rise to the virtues of common social life. But these practices in turn depend on a narrative understanding of that life. MacIntyre defines social practice as any:

“... coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.”<sup>22</sup>

From this we can conclude that, for instance, marriage and the practice of medicine are practices. Similarly, according to MacIntyre, chess and the game of football can be considered practices. Bricklaying, however, is not a practice but a skill in so far as it finds its point only in connection with a larger practice such as architecture.<sup>23</sup>

Hence we can list some characteristics of practices as understood by MacIntyre. First of all, they are end-means activities to the extent in which they realise an internal goal. So the goal of the practice of medicine would be the propagation of good health, in architecture the development of habitable useable ascetically pleasing space. Secondly, the means of achieving these goals is not

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid p 187.

<sup>23</sup> We pick up on the analogy of bricklaying because it is a theme that recurs in Hauerwas's thought. In AC he dedicates a chapter to “The Politics of the church: How We Lay Bricks and Make Disciples.” pp 93 – 112. Here Hauerwas uses the analogy of bricklaying as a craft in relation to the ‘craft of discipleship’ and the craft of discipleship in relation to the practice of being the church.



arbitrary. Practices must develop means of attaining their goals that are, at one and the same time, sufficiently stable and dynamic to allow for the growth of the practice and the human life it invests. Thus, medicine and architecture must be teachable to beginners but capable of evolving in the face of changing needs and knowledge. Thirdly, and notwithstanding the foregoing, practices must contain sufficiently definite means to generate formulable rules: which is to say "... those standards of excellence that are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of practice."<sup>24</sup> And fourthly, the intention to achieve the goals of the practice should identify the practitioners by their appropriation of rule-describable means.

Further to this, MacIntyre draws a distinction between goods externally attached to a practice and those intrinsic to it.<sup>25</sup> The example he uses is of a child who can be prompted to play chess for sweets - demonstrating an external relationship between the chess and the sweets- and the same child who plays because she enjoys the game of chess itself. This child demonstrates the discovery of "goods internal to the practice ... which can only be recognised by the experience of participating in the practice in question."<sup>26</sup> Participating in the practice in question, therefore, means becoming identified with and by that practice - in this case becoming a chess player. The extension of the analogy is clear, insofar as MacIntyre maintains that external goods can be understood almost in the sense of commodities and objects of competition, internal goods, characteristically, benefit or 'enrich' the whole community of practitioners. That is not to say that MacIntyre understands practices as simply an amalgam of technical skills.<sup>27</sup> Although this is a component in the broad understanding of practice, MacIntyre wants to maintain that technical skills are "transformed and enriched"

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<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre AV p 187.

<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre AV p 188.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p 188 - 189.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p 193.



by the conceptions of the good and the ends which the technical skill serves: "... no one is the master of a *techne* who does not understand how and in what way the end which the specific *techne* serves is a good, and that understanding requires a knowledge of goods and good in general."<sup>28</sup>

Knowledge of the good and goods in general in relation to *techne* prompts MacIntyre's further contention that virtues are internal to certain practices. In other words, virtues are to be located in practices whose pursuit evokes precisely those virtues. "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."<sup>29</sup> Thus MacIntyre maintains that there are a range of what he calls 'key virtues' which allow the achievement of the internal goods of practices. MacIntyre holds that the achievement of the goods internal to a practice can only be brought about by "... subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners."<sup>30</sup> This relationship demands that we accept, as 'necessary components' of any practice, that there are virtues which are evoked in every practice. Thus every practice requires a particular relationship between those who participate in it. The virtues are therefore to be understood as "... those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices."<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre argues, further, that the coherence of virtue in a definite moral character requires the grounding of the virtues in the shared practices and commonly agreed goods of a particular community or tradition.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre WJWR p 70.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre AV p 191.

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre AV p 191.

<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre AV p 191.

<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre AV p.191.

Thus, to specify what is meant by talk of a particular virtue we need to further specify a particular narrative background within which that virtue appears. This brings up the matter of narrative and tradition in relation to virtue.

MacIntyre argues, at chapter length,<sup>33</sup> that his concept of virtue makes sense only within a concept of selfhood "... whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end."<sup>34</sup> This concept of the unity of the self gives rise to a notion of a history within which the self is situated. The actions perpetrated by agents can only be explained by reference to the history of institutions, which are themselves represented by narrative display. One understands the excellence appropriate to a role or practice, therefore, only with reference to examples which explain and elucidate. MacIntyre writes:

"It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and who go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words."<sup>35</sup>

However, the social dimension of practices suggest that one person's life history will, undoubtedly, intersect with others'. These intersections mean that each individual history becomes bound up with the histories of institutions that

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<sup>33</sup> MacIntyre AV chapter 15 pp 204 – 225.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid p 205.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid p 216.

which we are active participants, embody a provisional consensus about the goods appropriate to the practice which is constitutive of that institution. Traditions arise when such consensus is reached concerning the ordering of goods relevant to a wide variety of practices. Thus a living tradition is one which evolves and adapts over time, responding to the ongoing conflict and tension about the ordering of goods.<sup>36</sup> We can see therefore that the concepts of practice, virtue, identity, narrative and tradition are all of a piece and co-dependent to the extent that they inform coherent moral discourse. On the matter of tradition, MacIntyre has much to say on the legacy of the Christian tradition of moral enquiry.<sup>37</sup> In particular he is interested in the fusion of Augustinian Christianity with Aristotelianism and its expression in a rehabilitated Thomism. Indeed, Aquinas provides MacIntyre with a dramatic illustration of a tradition of rational enquiry which is adequate for resolving the moral problems of modernity.

Since the publication of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre's influence on theology has been incredibly strong. As we have surveyed in Chapter 1 and seen above, his concerns range over three areas: ethical concepts and their position in a socio-historic context, his contention that the Enlightenment project is doomed to failure and that ethical discourse carried out under the guise of modern liberalism ignores the connection between standards of behaviour and socially embodied practices based on agreement about the goods which accrue from these practices. Understanding MacIntyre in this way, it seems, vindicates much of what Christian ethicists and theologians have been saying for some time. It has been suggested that there is a new confidence within Christian ethics. Christian ethicists have become distinctly more apologetic and polemical.<sup>38</sup> This may or may not be the case, but

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid pp 222f.

<sup>37</sup> See note 2 in the Introduction to this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Gill Moral "Communities and Christian Ethics." *Studies in Christian Ethics* vol. 18, no 1. 1995 pp 1 – 13.

distinctly more apologetic and polemical.<sup>38</sup> This may or may not be the case, but our exposition of MacIntyre does show that there is at least a contemporary philosophical ally for Christian ethics that itself relies on a methodology that unites the concepts of practice, virtue, identity, narrative and tradition to form coherent moral discourse. The work of Stanley Hauerwas embodies perhaps the most energetic, polemical and apologetic (or unapologetic, depending on one's perspective<sup>39</sup>) pursuit of the task of formulating a distinctive Christian ethic that focuses on recapturing the significance of the virtues for the display of Christian convictions. As such he has endeavoured to relate the concepts of practice, virtue, identity, narrative, character and tradition to form coherent ecclesial theological discourse.

#### 4.2.2. Hauerwas's Differences with MacIntyre

In this regard, although deeply indebted to the tradition of virtue ethics in general, and MacIntyre's virtue ethics in particular, Hauerwas displays a profound difference of opinion. He says, for instance that "...MacIntyre argues that philosophy necessarily must become the master craft if our hierarchies are to be rational. There I fear he and I may well be in disagreement ... since I necessarily must argue that theology, not philosophy, is in service to a community that ultimately must claim philosophy as a servant."<sup>40</sup> This slightly vague contention can be illuminated by a comment made by Hauerwas as he tries to define, with more resolution, his own activities

"... I began by trying to recapture the significance of the virtues for the display of Christian convictions. I am better acquainted of the *Nicomachean Ethics* than I am of the New Testament. I am often more interested

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<sup>38</sup> Gill Moral "Communities and Christian Ethics." *Studies in Christian Ethics* vol. 18, no 1. 1995 pp 1 – 13.

<sup>39</sup> See Hauerwas DFTF p 7 "That I do Christian theology in such an unapologetic, radical manner will seem particularly offensive to those with liberal sensitivities."

<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas AC p182 n 16.

in issues of epistemology and philosophical ethics than I am in most of the work done as 'systematic theology.' Yet in an odd way it was my increasing appreciation of the importance of Aristotle's understanding of *phronesis*, the kind of politics necessary to sustain an ethic of virtue, and the corresponding historicist perspective required by each that led me to appreciate Yoder's significance."<sup>41</sup>

If we can trust self-descriptions, we can see here that he sees philosophy as the servant to theology. That is, philosophy can be used to illuminate, and hence enhance appreciation of, theological insight. Thus, where MacIntyre seems content to provide a diagnosis and prognosis of the problems of modernity in terms relating to communities in general, Hauerwas is adamant that there is a cure in the shape of the particular community that is the church.

Hauerwas responds to the contemporary situation, therefore, with a constructive programme of ecclesial or church ethics presenting the church as precisely that community which offers the necessary context for coherent ethical discourse. We should be wary, however, of regarding Hauerwas as simply providing a facile response to MacIntyre's gloomy prognosis at the end of *After Virtue*. The prognosis suggests that "...[w]hat matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the

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<sup>41</sup> Hauerwas DFTF p 22. While Hauerwas's main ally is clearly MacIntyre, he has also been influenced by others as will become obvious. Here we see him acknowledge the significance of Yoder. John Milbank and Stanley Fish are two other thinkers to whom he is profoundly indebted at the moment. See DFTF p 198 n 30, p 214 n 7, p 221 n 5, AC p 9 on Milbank and DFTF p 5 on Fish. Wells writes, introducing Hauerwas's "... colleagues, those who share his anger with the state of Christian social ethics in North America and from whom he learned the foundations of a different approach. John Howard Yoder ... draws attention to the whole of the tradition [of Christian social ethics] outlined thus far simply swallows without question the social strategy of the Magisterial Reformers. ... What Yoder gives Hauerwas is a perspective from which he can see that the tradition from Rauschenbusch to Gustafson is united by common assumptions that can be seriously questioned." *Transforming Fate into Destiny: The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*. Forthcoming Paternoster Press Carlisle. p 10. Wells also notes that Hauerwas is joined in this debt by James W. McClendon particularly in *Ethics: Systematic Theology Volume One*. 1986. Abingdon Press. Nashville.

intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are upon us.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, as we have already mentioned, Hauerwas provides sagacious and insightful commentary of his own upon the contemporary theological and philosophical climate, and, as we shall see, his ecclesial ethics call for reinforcing the integrity of the church in its mission and ministry. This is a call that, as we saw Davis also issued. It will become clear that, though they share some intuitions concerning modernity, they reach apparently quite different conclusions. Nevertheless, I maintain that Hauerwas provides the strongest possible challenge to Davis's critical theology, because to return to Benhabib's comment "...if communicative or discourse ethics is to be at all credible, it must be able to meet the kind of challenges posed by MacIntyre and Hauerwas.”<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted, at this point, that whereas I described Davis as basically liberal, to the extent that while trying to break the liberal conservative theological deadlock he confessed to liberal political inclinations, Hauerwas has been described as post-liberal.<sup>44</sup> This designation comes from his association with the likes of George Lindbeck, Hans Frei and Ronald Thiemann. Although Hauerwas has concerns and even approaches in common with Lindbeck in particular, there are nevertheless significant differences.<sup>45</sup> While Hauerwas can be readily aligned with Lindbeck and Frei, in seeking to perpetuate Barth's understanding of theology as narrativist explication, he can be seen to be more radically post-liberal than either.<sup>46</sup> Hauerwas's approach is certainly less complicated and probably more

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<sup>42</sup> MacIntyre AV p 253.

<sup>43</sup> See Benhabib op cit.

<sup>44</sup> Jeffrey Stout says Postmodern theology "[a]lso called 'postliberal theology'; the quest initiated in recent years by the most interesting American followers [also known as the Yale school] of Karl Barth, to get beyond all forms of modernism in theology; either a *cul de sac* or the harbinger of a new theological age (too soon to tell)." *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*. 1988 Beacon Press. Boston MA. pp 301.

<sup>45</sup> See Placher *Unapologetic Theology*. pp 17 - 21, & 154 - 174. Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. 1984. London.

<sup>46</sup> See Milbank "Critical Study" *Modern Theology* No 4. 1987 - 88, pp 211 - 216.



profound. That is not to say that Hauerwas could ever be described as simplistic. For instance, Lindbeck wants to place the world in the text rather than the text in the world and in so doing:

“... he reduces the bible and doctrine respectively, to a set of fixed narrative structures and instantive rules for performative practice which allows Christianity to remain ‘essentially’ the same in a series of different ‘translations’ to meet the terms of varying historical contexts. The trouble with Lindbeck is not *simply* a sealed off sectarianism, but much more a continued liberal essentialism in new structuralist guise.”<sup>47</sup>

For Hauerwas the bible and the Church form a single dynamic, inhabited narrative. This dynamic represents the possibility of a different history embodied in the church and given by God in anticipation of the kingdom. There is no difference, then, between the world’s history and God’s history because God is God of both the church and the world. So, whereas Lindbeck generated a text/context dualism, Hauerwas creates a unity. This carries over into Hauerwas’s political insight where Christians do not operate as an isolated sect but operate in the world as Christians.<sup>48</sup>

For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, we will take the term post-liberal in two ways. In the first instance, and for the purposes of this chapter, we shall take it as a simple means of distinguishing between the liberal agenda of Davis designating, therefore, Hauerwas’s efforts to overcome the failures of liberal theology and assert his thesis that “... questions of the truth and falsity of Christian convictions cannot even be addressed until Christians recover the church as a political community necessary for our salvation.”<sup>49</sup> The post-liberal agenda that

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p 212.

<sup>48</sup> Hauerwas AtN p 2.

<sup>49</sup> Hauerwas AC p 26.



Hauerwas embraces is to insist on the Christian legitimization knowledge and the social order being thoroughly Christological and ecclesiological.<sup>50</sup>

In the second instance, in Chapter 7, we shall return to the term post-liberal and consider the consequences of using it to denote a method in theology that is broadly speaking non-foundational. That is to say, a method that sees the Christian tradition as "... 'an historically extended, socially embodied argument ... precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.' 'The Christian faith' is that set of beliefs and practices which in their social and historical reality provide the context for arguments about which beliefs and practices ought so to function."<sup>51</sup> Insofar as it refers to a non-foundationalist position, the designation post-liberal unites Davis and Hauerwas to the extent that Davis appreciates and applies the insights of Habermas's non-foundationalist position.<sup>52</sup> In this regard a

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<sup>50</sup> See particularly Hauerwas CCL pp 136 – 147 & 169 - 177. Hauerwas exercises and exorcises his interest in Barth's theology and ethics, understanding that Barth concedes to a degree the significance of character. However, Hauerwas contends that Barth finally relies on a preference for a language of legal command and thus criticises his ethics as concern with what we do rather than what we are.

<sup>51</sup> Ronald Thiemann *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise*. 1985. Notre Dame University Press. Indiana.

<sup>52</sup> Although the discussions surrounding foundationalism and non-foundationalism in philosophy and theology are many and varied, here we shall restrict ourselves to understanding it as follows. Beliefs fall into two categories. The first category that need the support of other beliefs and the second category in which beliefs are held to be self-evident. For a foundationalist in order for a belief to be rational it should be based on the foundation of either empirical or rationalist, deductive or conceptual justification. The most common response to this type of foundationalism is an approach that acknowledges no prior starting point for argument. Rather it relies on an appeal to what W.V. Quine suggested was a web of beliefs. Thus "... a discipline is rational not because it has a foundation, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise that examines all claims, all relevant background theories – even though not all at once." Schüssler Fiorenza *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church*. 1986. New York. p 287. This is clearly an adequate description of Davis's critical theology. Hauerwas's commitment to non-foundationalist narrative theology is more problematic. Is there such a thing as the 'Christian story'? Even an appeal to scripture does not clear that up. Different denominations adopt varying collections of books as the definitive canon, and even if everyone agreed one might argue that it still does not constitute one story. From there, as the variety of understandings of the unity of the story increase, one can argue that it does not take long for the notion of one story to become incoherent. That is to say nothing of the variety of interpretations that the church, the continuation of the story, has come up with over the centuries. Where is the proof the Christian story is true? Is there some universal arbiter? Because Hauerwas does not expand on ontology he has been accused of being a relativist who can give no reasoned argument as to why Christianity is more worthy of commitment than any other

point of which to take note and one to which we shall return in a later chapter when discussing catholicity, is Thiemann's insight that "[i]n order for rational argument to occur between proponents of theologically diverse positions, one simply needs some set of common beliefs from which to begin the process of persuasion. The more extensive the set of beliefs held in common, the broader the range of agreement is likely to be."<sup>53</sup> Having made this observation, though, we can anticipate a common theme in both Davis and Hauerwas. That is to say they are both Christian realists.<sup>54</sup> For Davis this means that rather than knowledge being foundational, love is foundational.<sup>55</sup> For Hauerwas as a post-liberal this means advocating a universalism of love, embodied in the church in anticipation of the peaceable kingdom.<sup>56</sup> It has been further suggested naming this as the Christian narrative makes Hauerwas dependent on confessional language.<sup>57</sup> This comment raises the issue of the scope of the tradition, community or church in question and the attendant charge of sectarianism.<sup>58</sup> In the meantime, in this chapter, we shall carry on to examine Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.

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of life. Indeed, Hauerwas admits that there is no objective way of choosing between Jew, Christian and Muslim (CET pp 10 – 11).

<sup>53</sup> Thiemann *Revelation and Theology* p 69.

<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas represents an orthodox Christian realism resting, as we shall see, on revelation. We can reasonably ask of him, therefore, does he not rest his case on claims that he cannot justify? Should he not be more explicit about the ontology that lies behind the theological statements that he makes: is he not simply a fideist? Indeed, Hauerwas does not elaborate much on what he means by revelation or even ontology and appeals more often to his interest in ethics as primary. Hence he can't be expected to explain everything. However, underlying all of Hauerwas's proposals is the insight that Christian truth claims are about lives and not propositions. Wells claims that this makes him "an unusually pragmatic realist." *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p 133.

<sup>55</sup> Davis WLWD p 117 Another point of contact between Davis and Hauerwas lies in Davis's appeal to Frei's understanding of realistic narrative.

<sup>56</sup> See John Milbank's review of Davis RMS *Theology* 98 1995 pp 320 – 322 where he puts this forward as the post-liberal agenda. Hauerwas US contains this argument.

<sup>57</sup> Gloria Albrecht "Article Review of *In Good Company: the church as Polis*" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 no.2 1997 pages 219 - 227.

<sup>58</sup> This new form of confessional foundationalism is criticised by Linell Cady "Resisting the Postmodern Turn" in Sheila Devaney (ed.) *Theology and the end of Modernity*. 1991. Trinity Press International Philadelphia. This is also quoted by Albrecht op. cit.

### 4.3. Hauerwas's Communitarian Concerns

I wish to maintain Hauerwas presents an energetic challenge to Christian ethical discourse that relies on natural law to give common ground in the attempt to contribute to the pluralistic public debate on politics and ethics. This agenda places Hauerwas, ostensibly, on the opposite pole from Davis. We shall see, however, that very similar themes and concerns drive and arise from their theologies, and these must be addressed in this investigation. The concerns are, broadly, the nature and task of theology, questions of social and religious identity, political action and plurality and the implications of these themes for the church.

As we have noted, while Hauerwas displays some hesitancy at being described as a communitarian,<sup>59</sup> and that he is interested in advocating a particular kind of community. That is to say, he is advocating the church, typified by particular characteristics, as the best model of community rather than arguing the priority of community generally.<sup>60</sup> However, the constructive nature of his programme places his work among shared concerns covered by the adjective 'communitarian.'<sup>61</sup> These concerns number four. The first is the coherence, or lack of it, of modern liberal society, and the theories upon which it is based, as a suitable background for intelligible ethical discourse. The other three, interrelated, concerns are the status of the individual; conceptions of the 'good' against rights;

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<sup>59</sup> Reinhold Hütter "The ecclesial ethics of Stanley Hauerwas." *Dialog* 30 Summer 1991 pages 231 - 241. Anthony B Robinson "The Church as Counter-cultural Enclave." *Christian Century* 107 August 8 - 15 1990 pages 739 - 741.

<sup>60</sup> See Rasmussen *The Church as Polis* pp 271 - 274.

<sup>61</sup> For an excellent concise discussion of these concerns see Ted Koonz "Mennonites and Postmodernity" in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*. 63 Oct. 1989 pp 401 - 427. While I use the term communitarian, I invoke it in the same way as I described Davis as post-orthodox. That is to say I recognise the provisional nature of the description while using it to situate Hauerwas's thought in a broad philosophical/theological context. A description such as communitarian could never do justice to the scope and vitality of Hauerwas's vision.

and concern with character. We shall use this collection of 'communitarian' concerns to aid in our analysis to establish the shape and extent of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.<sup>62</sup>

*4.3.1. The Incoherence of Modernity as the background for Ethical Discourse*

The modern problem of privatisation of religious convictions looms large in Hauerwas's agenda. Privatisation of religious conviction directly fosters the attempt of contemporary moral theories to "... secure foundations unfettered by the contingencies of our histories and communities."<sup>63</sup> Like MacIntyre, Hauerwas prefers to see the differentiation that gives impetus to this privatisation as 'fragmentation'. His attitude to the public sphere is, therefore, best described as suspicious. The plurality that results from this fragmentation is simply another name for confusion. In this confusion the church, as Hauerwas sees it, can participate in public life only to the extent and on the terms laid down by the dominant social polity or culture. To put it another way, Christians thus described are engaged in inauthentic political action. Instead of developing a theory of culture, then, Hauerwas wants to question the assumptions that adapt Christian theology, ethics and political action to the needs of the culture. In questioning these assumptions he wants to equip the church to be the church and to live, as it were, in the world but not of the world. Hence Hauerwas's serious contention

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<sup>62</sup> One of the problems with Stanley Hauerwas's thought and writing is that it does not lend itself easily to systematic descriptions. His writing is deliberately piecemeal and very often his substantive convictions and theoretical approach combine when he reflects on particular issues. It is no easy matter to distil a systematic representation of his work apart from these particular concerns. In trying to do so, or if one attempts to force it into a system, one would do violence to the integrity of his thought. Nevertheless to generate an accurate comparison with Davis some degree of systematisation is necessary. To this end we have chosen to utilise the communitarian concerns with the coherence (or lack of it) of modern liberal society as a suitable background for intelligible ethical discourse, the status of the individual, conceptions of the "good" against rights, concern with character, as hooks for the following analysis. For more on this see Chapter 7 on Milbank. Rasmussen faced the same problem in generating a comparison between Moltmann and Hauerwas. *Church as Polis* p176 – 179.

<sup>63</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 2 – 15.



that the first task of the church is not to make the world just but to let the world be world. The church, then, does not have a social ethic it is a social ethic.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, there is a *de facto* responsibility to advise on matters of public polity to the extent that they impinge on the well-being of the church and its members. He argues long and hard that what is needed is not "... theory but actual engagement with other people in hopes of finding and securing common commitments."<sup>65</sup>

Hauerwas argues, then, that all moral reasoning is radically contextual and narrative-dependent. As a result we must come back to the question of relativism. For Hauerwas, in the context of modernity, moral notions "... describe only as we have purpose for such descriptions which means that they do not merely describe our activity; they also form it."<sup>66</sup> Therefore, these notions are purpose dependent and are embedded in, and so affected by, specific narratives. Consequently when such a notion is challenged it becomes extremely difficult to resolve the conflict. The conflict cannot be reduced to relations between the principles and the facts because perceptions of both are formed by different narratives. In the case of justice, for instance, outwith a narrative community could we even assume that we share enough to know what justice might mean? The answer is no, unless we share a common narrative. For instance, for Hauerwas, understanding and discerning justice, as with all other moral notions, requires that we take up a distinctive way of life. Following MacIntyre, Hauerwas says talk of justice only makes sense when bolstered by more substantive moral language, that is to say the language of virtue. Gloria Albrecht<sup>67</sup> says that, for Hauerwas, "... [l]anguage is not just a neutral set of

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<sup>64</sup> Hauerwas RA p 43, COC p 40, PK p 99, AN p 74, CET p 101.

<sup>65</sup> Hauerwas PK p 60, COC p 106.

<sup>66</sup> Hauerwas TT p 21.

<sup>67</sup> Albrecht op cit. See also Gloria Albrecht *The Character of our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church*. 1995 Abingdon Press Nashville.

symbols: it is the symbolic representation of the meaning and value of the community that has formed it. As we learn our language we literally learn to see and understand our experiences." In this light the confusions of modernity are made intelligible from the perspective of narrative and tradition dependent discourse.<sup>68</sup>

A final consequence, for Hauerwas, of the incoherence of modernity as a background for ethical discourse echoes MacIntyre's concerns about the manipulation of ethical simulacra. That is, the modern liberal society is inherently violent and its polity is characterised by coercion. He says that liberal "... politics is finally an arena of limited options in which ideas must be wedded to the power of self-interest for the realization of relative goods."<sup>69</sup> In this world social life is understood as power struggle and human relations deteriorate into "... forms of manipulation to maintain dominance."<sup>70</sup> Economic and political systems regard self-interest as the dominant public virtue:

"We see ourselves and others as but pawns engaged in elaborate games of power and self-interest. I do not mean to suggest that there has ever been a time or social order from which manipulation was absent. What is new about our present situation is that our

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<sup>68</sup> Albrecht is not completely convinced by this understanding of language nor by Hauerwas's project. She says: "Hauerwas represents ... the appeal to traditioned community. With and acknowledged debt to MacIntyre and Stanley Fish, Hauerwas argues that intelligible human action requires the pre-existence of a particular community and its language which gives an individual the means of interpreting the material reality of the world and of one's interactions with it." Although she acknowledges a certain congruence in their interests, she claims that Hauerwas does not subject the traditioned community to the critique that is levelled at liberalism.. She says that if it is true "... that the confessional language of a tradition is all Christians have to fall back on, then who the 'we' is who have the power to define confessional language becomes very important. Who has access to the social power within this tradition to describe it? Do 'Christian' descriptions and practices, formed within a defense of oppressive practices mediate oppression? By Hauerwas's own account of material practices how can they not? By ignoring these questions, Hauerwas resists the full implication for ecclesiology of his epistemology. He repeats the errors for which he condemns liberalism."

<sup>69</sup> Hauerwas DFTF p 10.

<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas SP p 56 & COC p 84.

best moral wisdom can conceive of no alternative. We seem only to be able to suggest ways to make the game more nearly fair."<sup>71</sup>

This negative and suspicious conception of liberal society permeates all of Hauerwas's work. It is to this that he refers when he talks of Christians affiliating themselves to the liberal polity and thus losing their Christian vision.<sup>72</sup> We shall return to this issue when we consider the choice between conceptions of the good or the right.<sup>73</sup>

#### 4.3.2. *The Status of The Individual*

In the light of a tradition-dependent discourse, the second of Hauerwas's concerns that we ought to consider is the status of the individual.<sup>74</sup> For Hauerwas, the general denial of the individual as the locus of ultimate value and meaning has a correlative assertion that value and meaning, in fact, reside in larger, human concerns. Within these concerns the individual retreats, as it were, into the crowd. Consequently, the values attached to the individual in liberal theory, and associated with the language of rights also recede. For instance, Hauerwas says that it is not true that 'I am born to be happy since death is the end of my life, both teleologically and temporally. Therefore, 'I am born to learn to die for the right thing. Obviously this right thing must be something larger than myself.'<sup>75</sup> The highest good, then, is not individual self-fulfilment or happiness independent of a

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<sup>71</sup> Hauerwas PK p 9.

<sup>72</sup> Hauerwas refers us to a recent book in support of this contention. He cites Michael Himes and Kenneth Homes O.F.M., *Fullness and of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology*. 1993. Paulist Press. New York. They suggest that Christian belief in the trinity is not at odds with commitment to human rights. Hauerwas says he is puzzled by why they think that this matters and who they are trying to convince. He concludes that they might be trying to convince Catholics that they can be good liberals. In so doing they paint God as "... the great liberal bureaucrat." DFTF p 190

<sup>73</sup> Hauerwas refers "those anxious for an adequate characterization of liberalism" to his chapter "Killing Compassion" in DFTF p 164 – 176 or to MacIntyre's WJWR.

<sup>74</sup> These considerations come mostly from two books of Hauerwas's namely, COC and PK unless otherwise stated.

<sup>75</sup> Hauerwas COC p 86.



shared life with others. Hauerwas's paradigmatic description of Christian personhood sums this up "... [s]uch a people do not believe that everyone is free to do whatever they will, but that we are each called upon to develop our particular gifts to serve the community of faith."<sup>76</sup> Thus, for Hauerwas, the community of faith describes the parameters of concern for the individual, and is constituted by groupings such as the family and church and the relationships within and between them. This in turn gives substance to the larger human concerns that he has in mind. Moreover, these groupings obtain a moral priority which, broadly speaking, they are denied within so called liberal theory.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, individuals simply cannot be understood when abstracted from their historical and communal contexts. Histories and communities are not things that can be chosen randomly but are central to, and definitive of, the individual's identity. Thus, identity is a central concern for Hauerwas. It would not be fair to say, however, that Hauerwas's understanding of the individual rests on the value of the individual, rather it rests on the respective understandings of the individual's potential fulfilment within the community. For the communitarian, this is dependent on the ongoing fulfilment of the community from which he or she derives his or her identity and not independently of it.<sup>78</sup> For Hauerwas the ecclesial theologian, that fulfilment and the identity that ensues is tied to the church. Hence we realise Hauerwas's concern with identity.

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<sup>76</sup> Hauerwas PK p 103

<sup>77</sup> Hauerwas COC chapters 8 & 9.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, this is particularly clear in Michael Sandel's criticism of John Rawls. His critique rests precisely on the contention that Rawls has misunderstood and therefore misconstrued the self. Thus Rawls's individuals, behind a veil of ignorance, are not real people at all. See Sandel *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. 1982. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

4.3.3. *Conceptions the Good against Conceptions of Right*

The third concern that we ought to examine is Hauerwas's suspicion of the liberal priority of rights over conceptions of 'the good'. Put simply, the difference lies in a question of maintaining a society where individual rights are guaranteed over against communities that foster conceptions of the good. Much talk of rights presumes that individuals should pursue their own interests. Hauerwas says:

“We have made freedom of the individual an end in itself and have ignored the ... fact that most of us do not have the slightest idea of what we should do with our freedom. Indeed the idealists among us are reduced to fighting for the freedom or rights of others to realise their self interests more fully...”<sup>79</sup>

In a similar vein, as I pointed out in the introduction, Charles Taylor has noted that as moderns there is a strong sense that we demand universal justice, beneficence, equality, self-determination and the avoidance of death and suffering.<sup>80</sup> In other words, Hauerwas suggests that we might want to be good people but since we the good boils down to self-interest because “... we have lost any idea of what that could possibly mean.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, Hauerwas repeatedly points out that notions of individual rights undermine the very communities that give our lives meaning. Hauerwas comments that the language of rights seems to embody, at least in principle, “... the highest human ideals” while it endorses the “... assumption that anyone who does not agree with such rights is morally obtuse and should be ‘forced to recognize the error of his ways.’”<sup>82</sup> He goes on to conclude that even allowing for the kernel of good that rights and the language of rights possess, they actually provide a powerful justification for violence. Moreover, he says, to the extent that language of rights “... ‘absolutizes the relative’ in the name of a

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<sup>79</sup> Hauerwas COC p 80.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of The Modern Identity* p 495.

<sup>81</sup> Hauerwas COC p 80.

<sup>82</sup> Hauerwas PK p 61.

universal that is profoundly limited and limiting just to the extent that it tempts us to substitute some moral ideal for our faithfulness to God.”<sup>83</sup>

A good society, therefore, rather than protecting or guaranteeing rights should be in the business of being good (virtuous). A society will be virtuous to the extent to which the individual members are virtuous and this will in turn nurture more virtue in the individuals. So that, ethically speaking, the primary language should not be of rights but of virtues and how to nurture them. Hence we realise the concern with political action that Hauerwas describes as the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common. Nurturing virtues, therefore, equates, as we shall see, with political action. A society that operates along the lines of practising virtue helps the wider society not by abandoning the practice of virtue but by embracing it.

#### 4.3.4. *Character and Moral Discourse*

This leads us to consider a fourth concern of Hauerwas's, that is the concern with character, wherein identity and political action coalesce so as to form the moral agent. For Hauerwas the stress on character is a necessary response to the liberal mode of ethics which is in fact self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating: "...a social order that is designed to work on the presumption that people are self-interested tends to produce that kind of people.”<sup>84</sup> Opposed to the notion of self-interest is the notion of a 'common good'. The common good must, somehow, be achieved and preserved and the greatest possible common good attained. For the liberal, the common good is simply the sum total of individual goods or interests.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Hauerwas COC page 79.

Hauerwas argues, however, that this simple aggregate equation is fallacious. Hence his concern with character or, to put it another way "... the qualification of man's self agency through his beliefs, intentions and actions, by which a man acquires a moral history befitting his nature as a self-determining being."<sup>85</sup> Obviously this definition requires some serious unpacking, and we shall do so in the course of the following section. In the meantime, though, we should pick up a qualification that Hauerwas himself presents. When using the word character, and after an extended treatment of the etymology of the word, Hauerwas tells us that for any:

"[f]ull theory of character it is not enough simply to indicate phenomenologically the basic elements of having character in terms of the determination of the self. In other words it is not enough to explain the 'how' of the persistency of the self that allows a man to acquire a moral history which informs his action in the present and directs him in a particular way towards the future, but the 'what' must also be included. In order to explain the 'what' it is necessary to put the agent in the context of the communities from which he draws his moral norms, values and direction."<sup>86</sup>

Clearly, then, the 'what' and the 'how' combine to form character which pertains precisely to the virtues (norms, values and direction) nurtured in the community which nurtures the individual. Thus, since modern society lacks the coherence that can make meaningful moral disagreement and discussion possible, virtues like justice become legal currency for getting strangers to co-operate<sup>87</sup> and character, such as it is, is understood merely in terms of 'how' at the expense of the 'what'. For Hauerwas the church seeks to unite the how and the 'what.' The 'what' represents the character of God revealed in the Christian stories. The 'how' represents the church's teaching and developments of particular habits and

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<sup>85</sup> Hauerwas CCL p 12.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid page 17.

<sup>87</sup> Hauerwas AC pp 60 – 61.

practices derived from its understanding of virtue. So, in the same way as one trains to be a doctor,<sup>88</sup> becomes an apprentice to be a bricklayer,<sup>89</sup> so one practices with experts to become a Christian disciple.<sup>90</sup> An example of how this works in practice arises when Hauerwas displays some caution about characterising Christians primarily in terms of 'love', Christian, divine or otherwise. This hesitation arises because of the dangers that 'love' becomes abstract and malleable.<sup>91</sup> For Hauerwas, although love might be a characteristic of discipleship, it remains an abstract it remains so until it is embodied within the ambit of the Christian character, shaped by the community of faith and thus given substance. He starts, therefore, from a position of faith and focuses on hope.

Another example of how these concerns work together is to be found in the notion of justice. We shall here note briefly that there is an implication in Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics for the pursuit of justice that we shall consider in more depth in the next chapter. For Hauerwas, justice becomes a secondary virtue as the community structures that govern behaviour and identity generate an un-confused background for ethical reflection. Virtues that define and support the community, such as benevolence or fraternity, as well as their performance in the ritual practices of the community, come to the fore.<sup>92</sup> Justice is only needed as a norm when the virtues of a nurturing community recede.

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<sup>88</sup> Hauerwas TT pp 184 – 202.

<sup>89</sup> Hauerwas AC pp 93 – 112.

<sup>90</sup> Hauerwas CET pp 237 – 252.

<sup>91</sup> Hauerwas VV pp 11 – 29 & 111 – 126.

<sup>92</sup> This is an exceptionally complex and challenging argument, and will be considered in greater detail later in the thesis when we look at justice as a test case for the types of community of faith that Davis and Hauerwas call us to. In the meantime, see, for instance Sandel op cit 31 - 32

## 4.4 Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesial Theological Proposals

In the foregoing section we introduced communitarian concerns as a means of providing a basic insight into the shape and extent of Hauerwas's theological position. We saw how each of these issues raised a theological point for Hauerwas. We could go on building up on each of these individual issues at length. It would be more useful, however, to conclude this chapter by presenting a list of Hauerwas's ecclesial/theological proposals distilled from these communitarian concerns before going on to assess the implications ecclesial theological ethics on Christian ethics and thence the church.<sup>93</sup>

### 4.4.1 Holy Story

Hauerwas's starting point for his project is the revelation of the sovereign God, through the prophets, in Christ and through the church. In particular, Hauerwas is concerned with the Kingdom of God as it is embodied and revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>94</sup> The character of God is not, however, self-evident in any inspection of natural laws, moral law or even in human longing. It is, rather, revealed in the holy story of Christ, begun in the scriptures and continually worked out in the church. The definitive aspect of the holy story is the manner in which Christ met his death despite the apparent possibility that the world might be saved in some other way.<sup>95</sup> The history of the church relates the divine revelation to human contingency and makes it the locus of connection between God and human response.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny*. pp 126 – 130. Wells presents a similar and extremely useful systematic summary in these pages. He presents five theses that sum up Hauerwas's constructive project.

<sup>94</sup> Hauerwas SP pp 147 – 148.

<sup>95</sup> Hauerwas PK p 76. See also Chapter 6 of this thesis n 95.

<sup>96</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 78 – 79. This relates to the Gospel story

#### 4.4.2 *The Human Response*

While the conviction of the sovereignty of God is paramount in Hauerwas's thought, he chooses to concentrate on the human response to revelation.<sup>97</sup> Revelation calls people to be holy by imitating the character of the sovereign, holy God. It is for the people of God to be perfect even as God is perfect.<sup>98</sup> Christian ethics, is therefore, the process of developing the human response to God's revelation and hence shaping the historical community that embodied this response. That is to say, Christian ethics should be concerned with forming and informing the church.

Christian ethics, or theological ethics, that engage in any other practice such as forming guidelines or principles, regardless of the kind of person involved in implementing them, is misguided. For Hauerwas what is important is the kind of person involved.<sup>99</sup> Hence he can say actions are good if they lead to the formation of good people and good people are those who imitate the character of the sovereign God.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, to sustain such a people requires a community that must also display certain characteristics.<sup>101</sup> First, it must be nonviolent because capitulation with violence and force abrogates one's commitment to God who is loving and peaceable rather than forceful. In anticipation of the peaceable kingdom, the church's witness must also be peaceable.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> It would be to labour the point, and inappropriate at this stage, to make too much of the similarity with Davis in this perspective. We shall simply paraphrase Davis comment to the effect that Christian praxis, as he construes it, is a response to the reality of a transcendent gift or revelation. The message of revelation is, therefore, an ethical life, a way of being and acting. It may be partially articulated in propositions. It may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a practical way of life.

<sup>98</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 76 – 86. See also Chapter 6 of this thesis n 96

<sup>99</sup> Hauerwas COC pp 114 – 115 & TT pp 15 – 39.

<sup>100</sup> Hauerwas PK p 81.

<sup>101</sup> Hauerwas COC pp 9 – 35.

<sup>102</sup> Hauerwas PK 89 – 91, COC 36 – 52, AN p101. The significant and unique characteristic of Christ for Hauerwas lies in the cross. That Christ accepted the cross vindicated his nonviolent witness in the resurrection. Christ therefore makes possible the peaceful kingdom.



Second, the church must be holy as Christ is holy. By imitating Christ's nonviolent acceptance of his destiny, the church follows God's definitive revelation. Consequently the church has to do two things. First of all it must resist the temptation to be drawn into attempts to control the wider society, Secondly, it must establish a separate politics of discipleship, that creates the right kind of conflict, or at least the right conditions for resolution of conflict based on the practices of forgiveness and not coercion.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the church is the focus of God's purpose in the world and the purpose of the church is to embody the holy story of that divine purpose. Moral rationality, in terms of Enlightenment discourse is secondary to such a community and the church can embrace those otherwise excluded by such rationality.<sup>104</sup>

#### *4.4.3 Christian Character*

We have already mentioned Hauerwas's communitarian concern with character but, at the risk of some repetition, it is worth stressing the point as regards Christian character specifically. The primary question for Christian ethics is what sort of person one is or wants to be. Hence Christian ethics develops those practices that pertain to the formation of Christian character. Hauerwas contends that character is most fully displayed in the face of adversity. In the face of the irremovable negativities of human existence, such as death, Christian character does not assume that life is a virtue or a value in itself. The Christian history of martyrdom for instance suggests that some things are worth dying for.<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas cites other moments of adversity, such as the unwanted pregnancy or the retarded child, all of which raise the spectre of self-deception.<sup>106</sup> Self-deception can only be

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<sup>103</sup> Hauerwas CET 89 –99. The parallels with Davis understanding of the role of the church in creating optimum communication and Habermas's ideal speech situation are to be noted. We shall return to this matter in Chapter 7.

<sup>104</sup> Hauerwas lists the mentally handicapped, infants and the mentally ill as examples. VV pp 187 – 194, TT pp 147 – 168.

<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas TT pp 101 –115, CET 199 – 220.

<sup>106</sup> Hauerwas COC pp 167 – 174.

overwhelmed by truthfulness. Truthfulness, in turn, can only be achieved by commitment to the truthful story of God.<sup>107</sup> And commitment to that truthful story can only be sustained through the truthful community of character that is the church.

#### 4.5 Summary

In this chapter we have developed the theme of Hauerwas's distinctive, post-liberal ecclesial theology. We have seen that while this theology makes use of the philosophical insights of Alasdair MacIntyre, it does not simply import them. For instance, Hauerwas disagrees with MacIntyre about the relationship and priority of philosophy over theology. We argued that Hauerwas's post-liberalism offered three important insights. First of all, as Christians our understanding and interpretation of reality is mediated through the narrative community of faith that is the church. The church in turn is Christological in focus. Secondly, Christian ethics, focused on the church as the normative community, in particular is a direct challenge to the theories of autonomy upon which liberal theologies and theories like those of Davis and Habermas are based. Thirdly, he insists on the exclusivity and separateness of the church from the world and the necessity, as he sees it, for renouncing the liberal priority of the self while acknowledgement that all that is good comes to us not as a right but as a gift. Finally, as with Davis, this suggests a much more radical agenda than either political or liberation theologies, endeavouring as he does so to relate the concepts of practice, virtue, identity, narrative, character and tradition to form coherent ecclesial theological discourse that is not compromised by capitulation with modernity.

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<sup>107</sup> Hauerwas DFTF pp 31 – 88.

From here we go on to the second aspect of the task and, in the next chapter, in light of Hauerwas's ecclesial theology, examine the themes of the nature and task of theology in the public sphere and its implications for political action and the church. We shall do this as part of an exploration of the promise of ecclesial ethics, for while it is Hauerwas's intention to develop a meaningful theological discourse, he is also concerned with coherent ethical practice. The promise of ecclesial ethics is that authentic ethical practice or political action should, in the end, not make the world just but allow the world to be the world. That is to say, authentic political action represents the tactical deployment of the art of maintaining a good society subject to the witness of the peaceable kingdom which, in the final analysis, for Hauerwas represents the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common.

## **Chapter 5. Stanley Hauerwas and the Promise of Ecclesial Ethics**

As I noted in Chapter 4, Hauerwas provides a political insight to the effect that Christians do not operate politically as wanderers in a cultural desert, nor as an isolated sect but operate in the world as Christians. Like Davis, then, Hauerwas is concerned with what we are calling genuine political action. This concern stems from his avowed intention to stand against what he calls 'liberal' faith. Liberal faith, as Hauerwas understands it, seeks to accommodate itself to the spirit of the age of modernity. The spirit of the age against which he rails, involves a privatising of faith and a reduction of Christian activity and, therefore, relevance to the public sphere with little or no recognition of a separate, spiritual dimension.<sup>1</sup> In this context, 'liberal' Christian ethics that capitulate with the prevailing culture and, therefore, with the 'standard account' of modern moral discourse.<sup>2</sup> Again, the parallels with Davis's concerns are clear. As we have already pointed out, Hauerwas responds to this situation by offering a programme of ecclesial ethics presenting the church as precisely that community which provides the necessary context for coherent ethical discourse and political action. Thus, genuine politics, according to Hauerwas, is "... the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hauerwas CC p 121 and PK pp 96f.

<sup>2</sup> Hauerwas CCL p 25.

<sup>3</sup> Hauerwas *Epilogue* p 179

This view has several serious implications when considered in the context of ecclesial ethics. First of all, there might be something describable as a common good that is public in nature. Secondly, therefore, deliberation on the sort of people, communal structures and authority structures involved in shaping this kind of politics is essential. Thirdly, we are required to consider the question of religious identity and character in Hauerwas's Christian ethics and the shape of the community or church that sustains this identity and character. It is the purpose of this section to explore these implications in depth. In the first part of this chapter, therefore, I will first of all explore Hauerwas's conception of religious and social identity. Secondly I will explore the consequences of this understanding for the Christian tradition. Thirdly, I will raise the issue of revelation and plurality. Having done this we will move on, in the second part of the chapter, to consider the implications of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics for the church by reconsidering the charge of sectarianism, the criticism that is most consistently levelled at him.

### 5.1. The Implications of Hauerwas's Ecclesial Theology for Christian Ethics.

In the last chapter we concluded that Hauerwas's ecclesial theology manifested itself in an ecclesial ethic. Ecclesial ethics focuses theological reflection on the role of the Christian community in generating norms and identity. Returning to our definition of Christian ethics, I suggested that Christian ethics is concerned not only to relate an understanding of God to human behaviour but to explore the appropriate human response to God required by acknowledgement of the life death and

resurrection of Christ as the grounding of Christian ethical reflection.<sup>4</sup> This involves generating guidelines, in the light of a formal understanding of revelation, for both personal and social activity. Thus understood, Christian ethics involves consideration of religious identity, tradition and political action. From this starting point we shall explore and assess the impact of ecclesial ethics on Christian ethics. To this end we shall examine Hauerwas's understanding of religious and social identity, the relationship of identity to the Christian tradition and the role of revelation against a backdrop of plurality.

#### *5.1.1. Religious Identity*

As we have seen, for Hauerwas, the general denial of the individual as the locus of ultimate value and meaning has a correlative assertion that value and meaning, in fact, resides in larger, human concerns. The individual's fulfilment, for Hauerwas, is dependent on the historically contingent continuity of the community from which he or she derives his or her identity and not independently of it.<sup>5</sup> Returning to Hauerwas's definition of genuine politics as the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common, we must examine the matter of religious identity in relation to this definition. As we have noted previously, Hauerwas maintains that inauthentic political activity arises for the Christian when he or she attempts to exercise a direct influence on modern, liberal polity. Such an attempt leads to adapting to that polity and language and, therefore, colluding with the general trend toward religious privatisation. This in turn has a deleterious effect on one's

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> See Sandel *op. cit.*

religious identity because the more one adapts the more one loses the ability to see, think, understand and act as a Christian.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, Hauerwas equates authentic political action with the practices learned by Christians within the context of the Christian community.<sup>7</sup> For Hauerwas, the Christian community is, quite simply, the church and the church is the designated people of God.<sup>8</sup> The church comprises real people existing in definite historical and institutional forms,<sup>9</sup> called to witness to the peaceable kingdom<sup>10</sup> As such the church presents a counter-cultural enclave, witnessing to the kingdom of God in faithfulness to Christ:

“What it means to be Christian, therefore, is that we are a people who affirm that we have come to find our true destiny only by locating our lives within the story of God. The church is the lively argument, extended over centuries and occasioned by the stories of God’s calling of Israel and of the life and death of Jesus Christ, to which we are invited to contribute by learning to live faithful to those stories. It is the astounding claim of Christians that through this particular man’s story, we discover our true selves and thus are made part of God’s very life. We

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<sup>6</sup> This statement foreshadows our discussion of the charge of sectarianism against Hauerwas. In the meantime we can note that central to this problem is the issue of violence. The extent that Christians capitulate with the world is the extent to which they capitulate with the politics of violence and coercion and hence abrogate their commitment to nonviolence. In principle, there is no reason why Christians cannot be involved in law, government or public life as long as they are discriminating in their involvement (COC pp 72 – 86. Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p 133). The grounds for discrimination rest on the choice between violence and nonviolence. It must, however, be said that although this is the case in principle, it is difficult to see in practice how this might work, or how a particular tradition like the church might have priority over any other.

<sup>7</sup> Hauerwas IGC pp 6 – 8.

<sup>8</sup> Hauerwas CC p 2.

<sup>9</sup> Hauerwas CET pp 111f

<sup>10</sup> Hauerwas PK p 93.



become part of God's story by finding ourselves within that story."<sup>11</sup>

By 'finding' Hauerwas is of course picking up MacIntyre's understanding of practical reason whereby one discovers one's role and the goods appropriate to the role within a community.

For Hauerwas, though, the very notion of this kingdom, and uncovering one's role in it, implies a politic. To be a Christian, therefore, is to be a part of this politic. That is, to be part of the new *polis*.<sup>12</sup> But how can we best describe a participant in this new *polis*? If, at Hauerwas's urging, we understand the *polis* to be the community that witnesses to the kingdom then we may conclude with him that participation implies common discipleship. To summarise, for Hauerwas, becoming a Christian is to discover oneself located in God's story, which finds its expression in the church, which is in turn a witness to that self same story. This, it seems, is the identity which is at stake. "Such a people do not believe that everyone is free to do what ever they will, but that we are each called upon to develop our particular gifts to serve the community of faith."<sup>13</sup> This paradigmatic statement on Hauerwas's understanding of Christian person-hood reveals the relationship of the individual to the community as one of servitude.

It is important to mention the origins of this line of thought in Hauerwas's work. Hauerwas starts from a point of view that is basically in sympathy with the

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<sup>11</sup> Hauerwas CET p 102.

<sup>12</sup> Hauerwas CC pp 46 – 51 & AN p 116.

<sup>13</sup> Hauerwas PK p 103.

proponents of political theology.<sup>14</sup> The fundamental point of agreement is in the realisation “... that the meaning and truth of Christian convictions cannot be separated from their political implications.”<sup>15</sup> Hauerwas thinks that this alone is not enough and “... [t]hey are wrong, however, to associate politics only with questions of social change.”<sup>16</sup> His point of departure from the interests of political theology, therefore, comes in his understanding of genuine political activity. In taking his leave he maintains that the church not society is the primary locus and source of politics, so the crucial political question is “... what kind of community the church must be to be faithful to the narratives central to Christian convictions.”<sup>17</sup> This marks a significant departure from the political theologians in terms of the scope of the vision of the political horizon. That is to say, where the political theologian regarded politics and social change in the wider cultural sense to be the defining parameters of the nature and task of theology, Hauerwas sees the community of faith describing the parameters of concern. This is precisely because the church embodies a new *polis* and therefore, according to Hauerwas’s own definition, a specifically theological politics. Hence his much vaunted claim that the church is rather than has a social ethic. Politics in the wider sense of social and cultural change, therefore, can only be understood and related to in the light of the specifically theological politics of the church.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Rasmussen *Church as Polis*. Chapter 9 part 4 “Towards a Theological Politics” pp 187 – 189.

<sup>15</sup> Hauerwas CC p 2.

<sup>16</sup> Hauerwas Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Hauerwas Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> See Rasmussen *Church as Polis* p 187 – 188 where he makes a similar point in relationship to Jürgen Moltmann “Moltmann and political theology make politics the basic horizon for Christian theology and practice. Hauerwas can be said to agree but their understanding of the political horizons differ. For Moltmann the politics of the national and world communities, and more precisely power over the national (or future world) state has priority. Hauerwas, on the other hand, sees the church, the called people of God as the primary locus for a new politics.”

Such a perspective, and the attendant understanding of the primacy of theological politics, gives rise to a stark distinction between the church and the world, and the ongoing concern with Hauerwas as a sectarian. Leaving the sectarian criticism aside for the moment we can see that the church-world distinction has significant implications for notions of religious identity. Hauerwas says himself that, ultimately, the church is "... known by the character of the people who constitute it."<sup>19</sup> Since the church is the locus of authentic political action Hauerwas clearly presents us with the conclusion that political action has, at its heart, an issue of identity. Further to this Hauerwas sustains a distinction between ethics as general theories and a particular understanding of Christian ethics as theories of the Christian way of life.<sup>20</sup> This in turn gives rise to a particular understanding of identity relating to the Christian tradition.

#### 5.1.2. *Identity and The Christian Tradition.*

Given Hauerwas's understanding of genuine politics, we turn now to examine in more detail exactly what constitutes the specifically Christian identity of Hauerwas's new *polis*. As we have seen already Christian identity, for Hauerwas, is a political identity, and to become Christian is to become part of the church. However, for Hauerwas, the church is a community called to witness in common discipleship. It is quite clear, therefore, that the defining characteristic of Christian identity for Hauerwas is discipleship and "... if we lack that character the world rightly draws the

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<sup>19</sup> Hauerwas PK p 109.

<sup>20</sup> James Wm. McClendon Jr. outlines a similar definition in his *Systematic Theology: Ethics*. p 47 "Thus 'ethics' will generally (though not always) be used here of *theories* of morality, that is of conduct or a way of life; accordingly, 'Christian ethics' will refer to theories of the Christian way of life."

conclusion that the God we worship is in fact a false God.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, the truthful life is formed through faithful participation in a communal tradition of authentic political activity.

According to Hauerwas, becoming part of the church is to be joined with the body of Christ and to be immersed in its daily practices such that “... we are transformed over time to participate in God’s life.”<sup>22</sup> Christian life, thus defined, concerns the formation of an identity which is described by the tradition-formed community that is the church. “To become a disciple is not a matter of new or changed self-understanding, but rather to become part of a different community with a different set of practices.”<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Christian religious identity, for Hauerwas, is not something that comes naturally nor automatically, but is something that can be taught and requires training.<sup>24</sup> Hauerwas famously invokes examples to describe the nature of this training. The examples include the learning of a musical instrument or the apprenticeship in the craft of bricklaying or learning a language, all of which, he claims, demonstrate a parallel with learning to be a disciple. Moreover, these examples suggest that one has to be initiated into a tradition maintained by a community and taught by people who have already mastered, or are more advanced in their study of the particular crafts.<sup>25</sup> Thus, one learns not only what to do but how to do it properly. Being a disciple, and for Hauerwas being moral, means that one is formed in certain ways that involve seeing, understanding and practising in the right

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Hauerwas VCC p 20,& PK p 93.

<sup>23</sup> Hauerwas AC p 107.

<sup>24</sup> AC p 93 – 111 and RA p 93 – 111.

<sup>25</sup> Hauerwas AC p 101.

way. "Living morally is not simply holding the right principles; it involves nothing less than learning to desire the right things rightly."<sup>26</sup> So, for Hauerwas, being and doing coincide. To be a Christian means to live according to the practices of the Christian tradition which, in turn, develop Christian characteristics in the individual. Inevitably, highly developed ecclesial practices are required to sustain notions of common good that genuine political action is involved in discerning. The community of faith is therefore, a community of character engaged in transforming the individual, over time, to become part of God's life.

To elucidate these various claims concerning character, we return to Hauerwas's concern with virtue and virtue language.<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas finds it useful to substantiate his talk of discipleship with virtue language<sup>28</sup> For the church to fulfil its role of witness to the kingdom of God, and to provide an alternative politics, a certain kind of people "... are required to sustain it as an institution across time."<sup>29</sup> For Hauerwas, this means a people of virtue. Given his particular understanding of virtue, that means a people possessed of the goods by reference to which they define their relationships to those other people with whom they share the practices necessary to remember and retell the story of Christ.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it is important to note that Hauerwas's virtue language is derived not from general accounts of human nature or

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<sup>26</sup> Hauerwas CET p 103.

<sup>27</sup> Hauerwas VV pp 48 – 67, TT pp 40 – 56, CC pp 111 – 152, PK pp 102 – 106, CET 191 – 197. Hauerwas's discourse on virtue come mostly from his earlier writing wherein he laid the foundations of his theoretical understanding of ecclesial ethics. By the time his of his later work he was no longer interested in virtue theory in general but rather in Christian Virtue in particular.

<sup>28</sup> For Hauerwas's relationship between virtue and discipleship the following articles are useful Happiness pp 28f. VCC p 4.

<sup>29</sup> Hauerwas PK p 103.

<sup>30</sup> This relates to MacIntyre's account of virtue. See p 171 of this thesis and AV p 191

human good but from the life understood and depicted in the Christian story. He says, "...there is no virtue theory in general. Rather the characterisations of the virtues and their content, how they interrelate, will differ from one community and tradition to another."<sup>31</sup> Virtue is, therefore, reinterpreted by Hauerwas as the "...skills for a people who are trying to be faithful to a journey they believe to be crucial for God's dealing with the world."<sup>32</sup> These virtues, then, are not to be understood to hold true always and everywhere for everyone. They are, rather, particular to the church and dependent on the church. That is to say, specifically Christian behaviour, character and practice actually makes a difference not only to individual virtues but to the very understanding of virtue itself.

Therefore, rather than taking this understanding and pursuing a description of a well defined *telos* for human life, Hauerwas reverts to the metaphor of journey:

"For the *telos* in fact is a narrative, and the good is not so much a clearly defined 'end' as it is a sense of the journey on which that community finds itself. In political terms it means that the conversation of community is not *about* some good still to be realised, but the conversation *is* the good insofar as it is through the conversation that the community keeps faithful to the narrative."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the character of the Christian narrative forms the description of the virtues and determines the most significant. It is in this respect that he describes the church as a

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<sup>31</sup> Hauerwas *The Difference of Virtue*. p 260.

<sup>32</sup> Hauerwas *Happiness* p 29.

<sup>33</sup> Hauerwas PK p 119.

community of virtue. More significantly, for Hauerwas, this virtue forms and sustains Christian character

The connection, for Hauerwas, between the skills mentioned above and genuine political action and identity becomes even more obvious at this point. This is because virtue, or more correctly the virtues, thus understood is clearly political. That is to say, Hauerwas does not deny that other communities may share a natural understanding of virtues such as faith, hope, charity, love and so on. They may even need such an understanding just for survival. It is Hauerwas's substantive point, however, that the virtue the Christian community displays, deriving from the Christian tradition, is the most true and therefore the most efficacious in terms of engendering coherent ethical practice.<sup>34</sup> Thus, questions about the truth or validity of actions are to be more usefully understood as questions about the truthfulness of the questioner. Such a question, for Hauerwas, is a question about character. For Hauerwas,<sup>35</sup> the struggle for truth, implies a question of character. Truth as a value is meaningless unless it is understood in light of self-involvement. That is to say the pursuit of true facts or beliefs, true to 'any thinking person' in the guise of a neutral observer is a pointless endeavour.<sup>36</sup> But the self-involvement for the Christian is involvement in the church and the Christian story.

This marks a distinctive break for Hauerwas from other, more traditional understandings of virtue. The Christian is not at liberty simply to adopt such an

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<sup>34</sup> Hauerwas PK p 103.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Hauerwas's TT.

<sup>36</sup> Hauerwas TT pp15 -39.



understanding, as say the ancient Greek, because the Christian *telos* is different. For example, Hauerwas draws extensively on Aristotle but in the final analysis cannot build an understanding of the virtues on Aristotle's account because, he maintains, Christianity announces a new end for humanity.<sup>37</sup> We must, however, put another question to Hauerwas here. In the first place we saw in the last chapter, according to Hauerwas, that, all else being equal, there were no grounds for choosing between one tradition and another. Thus he could be accused of irredeemable moral relativism.<sup>38</sup> So, in what sense would the Christian vision be better or more true than any other, and why maintain such a contention? Similarly, while acknowledging the caveat that we noted previously, with regard to the new Christian *telos*, Hauerwas still imports a conception of Aristotelian virtue via MacIntyre and Aquinas. John Milbank claims that there is a question hanging over this idea of virtue. Milbank suggests that the antique notion of virtue contains an unpalatable presumption of violence. Hence would not any Aristotelian conception of virtue, however diluted, always be at odds with the politics of the peaceful kingdom that Hauerwas advocates?<sup>39</sup> Hauerwas has as yet not provided an adequate response to this charge. However, an investigation of his attitude to the form and content of the revelation that informs his understanding of both virtue in a Christian setting and the new *telos* of Christianity, will illuminate his

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<sup>37</sup> Hauerwas VCC pp 9 –21. See also Rasmussen *Church as Polis* p 197 n 47.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance Ogletree "Character and Narrative: Hauerwas' Studies of The Christian Life." *Religious Studies Review* 6/1 (Jan. 1980) pp 24 – 30.

<sup>39</sup> Milbank *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 1990. Basil Blackwell. Oxford pp362 – 376. "Hence the word *arete* (virtue) is always a standard of victory, and while conquest puts an end to war, it requires a preceding war, and only ends war by war. It appears, of course, that the Greeks believed that a stable peace depends upon justice, yet their aspiration to justice that is more than victory is precarious. "Because virtue presupposes justice, and justice involves real peace, *the ontological priority of peace to conflict* (peace is what is most real, most secure, most guarantees human life) is an issue of *yet more importance* than that of virtue." [Milbank's emphasis]

position with regard to the issue of relativism and with regard to the convictions that underlie his concept of virtue.

### *5.1.3. Plurality Identity and the role of Revelation*

For Hauerwas, the new end for humanity is displayed in the vision of an eschatological concept of the kingdom of God revealed through the gospels.<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas maintains that the centre of all theological notions within the narrative community that is the church is the story of the life, death and resurrection of Christ with its prologue in Israel. As such it provides a series of events which are "... decisive for God's relationship to mankind."<sup>41</sup> This narrative is further worked out in the community of discipleship in which:

"Jesus's life was seen as the recapitulation of the life of Israel and thus presented the very life of God in the world. By learning to imitate Jesus, to follow in his way, the early Christians believed they were learning to imitate God, who would have them be heirs of the kingdom."<sup>42</sup>

Thus, common discipleship represents, for Hauerwas, the continuation of the life of Christ and as such is the appropriate response to God's revelation. Further to this, revelation provides the basic core of the Christian identity. Inevitably, in the face of a public sphere with rational criteria for the assessment of knowledge and truth claims, we have to weigh up the strength of Hauerwas's 'revealed' ecclesial theology.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Hauerwas CC pp 44 – 46, PK, 76 – 91, AN pp107 – 121, RA pp 86 – 92, US pp 63 – 72.

<sup>41</sup> Hauerwas PK p 77.

<sup>42</sup> Hauerwas PK p 78.

<sup>43</sup> Hauerwas CC pp 53 – 71, PK pp 64 – 71, US pp 15 – 44.

Hauerwas says:

“All knowledge of God is at once natural and revelatory. But like all knowledge it depends on analogical control. Analogies, in turn, derive their intelligibility from paradigms that draw on narratives for their rational display. Our narratives of God’s dealing with us inspire and control our attempt to test how what we know of God helps us understand why the world is as it is.”<sup>44</sup>

This suggests that the distinction, commonly held, between revealed and natural theology is, for Hauerwas, a false distinction. The nature of Hauerwas’s ecclesial ethics and therefore of Christian ethics is that they are “determined by the fact that Christian convictions take the form of a story, or perhaps better a set of stories, that constitutes a tradition, which in turn creates and forms a community.”<sup>45</sup> As a result the way the Christian faith helps people to interpret the world has priority over ethical rules. Being a Christian is to “... grow into the story of Jesus and the story of God’s kingdom.”<sup>46</sup>

This might suggest that Hauerwas’s ethics is subject to a different set of epistemological criteria than, say, liberal ethics. In the face of this, Hauerwas maintains that his ecclesial ethics is not methodologically different from other modes of ethical discourse:

“Christian ethics is not in principle methodologically different from other ethics, for I suspect all accounts of

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<sup>44</sup> Hauerwas PK p 66.

<sup>45</sup> Hauerwas PK p 24.

<sup>46</sup> Hauerwas PK p 30.

the moral life require some appeal to the virtues, principle and narrative display of each. What makes Christian ethics Christian is not our methodology, but the content of our convictions.”<sup>47</sup>

The content of these convictions come, as we have seen, from the community which is attempting to be faithful to the revelation of God in Christ. In other words Hauerwas’s epistemology, such as it is, is tied to Christology and bound up in ecclesiology.<sup>48</sup>

The distinction between revelation, tradition and faith on the one hand and reason and rationality on the other, is only a relevant distinction when we forget the communal basis of our values. Following MacIntyre, Hauerwas sees knowledge as formed and tested within the communal traditions of enquiry under the rigours of substantive rationality. As such there is no longer any need to maintain the dualism of revelation and reason. Indeed, Hauerwas disputes any move to place revelation in a special epistemological category. Revelation, he says, is knowledge about God, not the method of deriving that knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, insofar as all knowledge is context dependent, then Hauerwas can conceive of no significant problem with claiming a rational basis for both revelation and Christian identity in the public sphere. We can conclude that Hauerwas does not see revelation as an independent

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<sup>47</sup> Hauerwas PK p 69.

<sup>48</sup> Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p128. See also Hauerwas “Failure of Communication or A Case of Uncomprehending Feminism.” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 no.2 1997 pp 228 – 239. In response to Gloria Albrecht, Hauerwas writes in this article “So when Albrecht later in her review suggests that I resist the full implications of my epistemology for my ecclesiology, I can only say that ecclesiology is all I have. I understand, of course, that it may come as startling news to Albrecht that I do not have an epistemology and she may find this problematic, but that is another issue.”

<sup>49</sup> Hauerwas PK p 66.

epistemological category, separate from the church. It is not separate precisely because the church is the embodiment of the practices and habits through which we come to understand the character of God. Furthermore, he can allow for God to be at work in the whole of the world:

“...once one begins with the rationality of Christian claims about God ... we can then indicate how the very finite character of existence is a witness to God. But the witness is not just to God’s existence, but to a very particular kind of God that we have learned to name through the very means God has made available to us – that is through the ongoing practices of a community who has learned what it means to be a creature and redeemed.”<sup>50</sup>

As we have already noted the story of the kingdom, upon which this understanding of revelation depends, is the story of Jesus. The life and destiny of Christ gives substance to this revelation in that it shows, for Hauerwas, that God does not govern by force. The new *telos* that the Christian tradition proclaims is the coming of the kingdom in Christ, as illustrated by the Sermon on the Mount. That this is not an impossible utopian vision depends on the eschatological dynamic in the teaching of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> The eschatological dynamic is made sense of precisely because God has acted in history, initiating the kingdom of God in Christ. This, in turn, is the necessary condition for the possibility of the existence of a community of discipleship

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<sup>50</sup> Hauerwas *On God*. p 208 This quotation comes from an article dealing with Hauerwas’s understanding of the trinitarian nature of the Godhead. It is outwith the scope of this thesis to deal with this issue except to the extent that it might, as in this case, illuminate a more general matter.

<sup>51</sup> Hauerwas PK p 85.

that witnesses to this revelation and to salvation. Substantively, for Hauerwas, salvation subsists in that:

“...Jesus saves us from sin and death. Yet sin and death are embodied in a history that requires an alternative history if our salvation is to be anything more than a vague hope. The name we give to the social manifestation that makes that history present is the *church*.”<sup>52</sup>

Salvation, then, is socially and historically mediated through a specific people of God. In other words, through the story of Christ, with its prologue in Israel and continuation in the historic church, God has created a people to bear the new life that Christ’s life, death and resurrection made possible. Consequently, Hauerwas does not see Christ simply as an exemplar of a way of life. Rather because he sees “...the ontological change occasioned through Christ’s resurrection...”<sup>53</sup> he can assert that “...forgiveness and love are real alternatives to the coercion the world thinks necessary for existence. Thus our true nature, our true end is revealed in the story of this man in whose life, we believe is to be found the truth.”<sup>54</sup> This christocentric understanding of the Christian revelation, and therefore of Christian identity, as well as being faithful to his radical reformed agenda is theologically decisive to the extent that ethics thus based is not complicit with liberalism.

Christian identity, therefore, means being a disciple of Christ. Discipleship and identity are not possible apart from christology. The gospels, which display the story

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<sup>52</sup> Hauerwas *Epilogue* p 163; CET pp 47 – 54; RA pp 49 – 68; AC pp23 – 44.

<sup>53</sup> Hauerwas *Epilogue* p 162.

<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas PK p 87.

of Christ, train us to "... situate our lives in relation to that life. For it was assumed by the churches that gave us the gospels, that we cannot know who Jesus is without learning to be his followers."<sup>55</sup> Discipleship is communal and assumes the memory and the society of the church, while having an impact on its common life. Private discipleship is not an option because God is creating a new *polis*. Therefore, Hauerwas's Christology and social activity are to be seen as intimately related. In the final analysis, the impact of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics on Christian ethics is to construe appropriate response to God's revelation in the church as the ongoing presence of Christ in the world. This presence has significant political and social consequences. Indeed Hauerwas writes:

"Christianity is mostly a matter of politics – politics as defined by the gospel. The call to be part of the gospel is a joyful call to be adopted by an alien people, to join a counter-cultural phenomenon, a new *polis* called the church."<sup>56</sup>

To conclude, we have examined the implications of Hauerwas's ecclesial theology for Christian ethics through an exploration of religious identity and political action. We have seen that this investigation leads us to the conclusion that, for Hauerwas, religious identity is tied up with the church. The church, in turn, provides a communal identity which is christocentric, developing a community of character which reflects the values of forgiveness and mercy while highlighting the counter-cultural dynamic of this new identity.

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<sup>55</sup> Hauerwas PK p 74.

<sup>56</sup> Hauerwas RA p 30.



The stark christocentrism of Hauerwas's new religious identity for the individual and for the church has led, frequently, to allegations of sectarianism against him. It has been said of Hauerwas, that if he was to be consistent, he would relinquish the possibility of advising, even in the most general sense, on matters of public policy.<sup>57</sup> This charge though harsh, cuts to the very heart of his attempts to do Christian ethics and present a publicly viable theology. Nevertheless, Hauerwas is determined to keep his approach going in such a way that the narrative community, as the locus for Christian faith and language, are radically distinct from public language and accountability.<sup>58</sup> The church is only one of the many influences shaping the life and thought of today's Christian. We must ask, therefore, if it can possibly have priority. Hauerwas assertion that it can has led to the accusations of relativism or even sectarianism because, ultimately, he is not arguing that any narrative or narrative community is as good as any other but that Christianity is the best.<sup>59</sup> In the next section we shall examine the impact of this conceptualisation of Christian ethics for the church and deal with the charge of sectarianism.

## 5.2 The Implications of Ecclesial Ethics for The Church

In this chapter we have so far explored Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics, and recognised the impact of ecclesial ethics for Christian Ethics. We are now in a position

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<sup>57</sup> Nelson *Narrative and Morality*. p 138.

<sup>58</sup> Hauerwas AC p 16. "I have learned that there is simply nothing I can do to prevent my position from being described as fideistic and/or sectarian. That these categories presuppose the epistemological and social positions I am challenging does not quiet the criticism." He goes on to claim that his most significant attempts to refute this accusation come in CET and RA.

<sup>59</sup> See McClendon *Systematic Theology: Ethics* pp 71, 214.

to pull the threads together and ascertain precisely the implications of ecclesial ethics for the church. Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics is not content to suggest that the appropriate human response to God's revelation is merely coherent ethical discourse but that such a discourse should manifest coherent ethical praxis. This quest for praxis is made sense of, once again, within the context of the church. To understand this position we shall explore three issues. First of all, we shall look at Hauerwas's conception of authentic political action and deal with the allegations of sectarianism. Secondly, we shall see how this position leads to endorsing the ecclesial counter culture. Finally we shall explore what it means for the church to be a community of character.

5.2.1. *Authentic Political Action: Theology as Guerrilla Warfare*<sup>60</sup>

If, as Hauerwas claims, authentic political action is the conversation necessary for people to discover the goods that they have in common, then perhaps the most obvious point of concern with regards to Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics is the relationship between the church and the world. As we have observed already, when Hauerwas talks of the church, he uses the term to denote a real people in definite historical and institutional forms.<sup>61</sup> As such, real people in real social situations must perforce act in the world. The church, as we have seen, operates as an interpretative community when it comes to scripture. However, Hauerwas extends the notion of an

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<sup>60</sup> I excuse the military imagery in this section heading by quoting Hauerwas on the title of his book *Dispatches From The Front*. p 18 "The military imagery contained in the title of this book is meant to challenge the widespread assumption that pacifists are passive. ... Those committed to Christian non-violence do not seek conflict, but in a world that has learned to call violence order, they know that they cannot avoid confrontation." It is terms of this confrontation that I wish to use the term guerrilla warfare.

<sup>61</sup> Hauerwas PK p 107, "Epilogue" p 153, CET pp 111ff, Why RA, p 424.

interpretative community, in the face of what he maintains is the essential incoherence of modernity as the background for ethical discourse, to the interpretation of these actions in the world. The church's role in respect of the modern public sphere, by interpreting these actions and relating them to the holy story, is to create people of virtue and character.<sup>62</sup> In so doing, he argues, the church provides a base for meaningful contribution to the public sphere.

However, for a number of reasons Hauerwas is charged with maintaining a sectarian position. Indeed it is the most consistent charge that is levelled at his ecclesial ethics. Rasmussen, for instance, devotes a whole chapter to the genealogy of this charge on the basis that this might be a deficiency in Hauerwas's position.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Hauerwas has himself responded to this charge in his usual polemical fashion.<sup>64</sup> The roots of the problem lie broadly in four components of his ecclesial ethics. First of all, the communitarian thrust of his ecclesial ethics leads to a withdrawal from the public sphere of ethical discourse.<sup>65</sup> Secondly, he endeavours to keep Christian faith and language separate from public language and accountability and thus renders it unintelligible to the world at large.<sup>66</sup> Thirdly, Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics have been described as sociologically impossible, since there seems to be no way of defending the

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<sup>62</sup> Hauerwas CET p 13.

<sup>63</sup> Rasmussen pp 231 – 247.

<sup>64</sup> See note 58 above where I observed that in AC 163 note 3 Hauerwas claims his most significant attempts to refute this accusation come in CET and RA.

<sup>65</sup> Gustafson in "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, Church and the University." *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society*. 40 (1985) pp 83 – 94.. p 88 makes this charge "... this [Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics] means that Christian morality is not based on a concern to be responsible participants in the ambiguities of public choices. It is rather based on its fidelity to the biblical narratives, and particularly to the gospel narratives."

<sup>66</sup> Gustafson in "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, Church and the University." pp 92 – 94.

primacy of the community of faith over any other tradition that might have an impact on shaping us.<sup>67</sup> Fourth, Hauerwas has been accused of excessive christocentrism insofar as tying the communal identity so closely to Christ makes God into a tribal God and not recognisably the creator of the world.<sup>68</sup> Clearly, then, sectarianism is an extremely wide-ranging charge that cuts to the very heart of Hauerwas's theology. In this section we shall explore precisely what these criticisms mean for an ecclesial counter culture. We shall do this in terms of asking what the relationship of Hauerwas's church is to the world thereby investigating Hauerwas's claim that the world only knows that it is the world because of the existence of the church as a separate people.<sup>69</sup>

Superficially, the fact that Hauerwas makes a distinction between church and the world, characterised as modern liberal society and seen in a pejorative light, is irrefutable. However, Hauerwas echoing his position on revealed and natural theology, maintains that the two are not to be understood as oppositional in the traditional sense. The world, as he understands it, is a theological construct.<sup>70</sup> Church and world have no meaning apart from each other, each says something about the possibility of the existence of the other's perspective. In the end, he concludes, the distinction between church and world is not a "distinction between realms of reality, between orders of creation and redemption, between nature and supernature..."

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<sup>67</sup> Gustafson in "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, Church and the University." pp 90f; Nelson *Narrative and Morality*. p 137.

<sup>68</sup> Gustafson in "The Sectarian Temptation: Reflections on Theology, Church and the University." p 93; Wogaman *Christian Perspectives in Politics*. Pp 111 – 113 & 137 – 140.

<sup>69</sup> Hauerwas CC p 91 & PK p 100.

<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 101 – 102 & 166, CC p 247.

rather it is a distinction "... between agents."<sup>71</sup> That is to say he sees the distinction between the church and the world more as a distinction between those of a certain character and those of another. Strictly speaking, between those who follow Christ and those who do not. Consequently, as we have already seen, authentic Christian agency is compromised to the extent that the Christian capitulates with modernity and does not follow Christ. In these circumstances the ability to see, to think and to act like a Christian is limited. Thus, the world can be in the church limiting its faithfulness and truthfulness.

"Those of us who attempt to live faithful to that kingdom are acutely aware of how deeply our lives are held to and by the world. But this cannot be an excuse for acting as if there were no difference between us and the world. For if we use our sin to deny our peculiar task as Christians and as members of the church, we are unfaithful to both the kingdom and to ourselves – and most importantly to the world itself."<sup>72</sup>

To this extent the world is opposed to the church, and like the church, subject to God's judgement.

On the other hand, the world is the same world that was created, loved and redeemed by God.<sup>73</sup> Rasmusson refers this as Hauerwas's relation to the "double Johannine concept of the world as both that order that is in opposition to God and therefore under God's judgement and the world created, loved and redeemed by

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<sup>71</sup> Hauerwas PK p 101.

<sup>72</sup> Hauerwas CET p 102.

<sup>73</sup> Rasmusson *Church as Polis* p 211.

God.”<sup>74</sup> Hence, because the world is God’s world, it is not possible for the church to be completely opposed. That is to say, the church cannot be “... anti-world but rather an attempt to show what the world is meant to be as God’s good creation.”<sup>75</sup> This exemplary position is only possible to the extent that the world’s opposition to the church is not ontological, and this is precisely what Hauerwas takes from the ‘double Johannine’ concept of the world. If the church-world opposition is not ontological then the world, as the church is, must be historical and contingent. As such, in the same way as the world can affect the church, there is scope for the church to change the world, to make the world, not holy, but the world. The change is wrought, not by violent means but through the witness of the church to the peace, justice and salvation of the kingdom because the world is already, in principle, loved and redeemed by God. Hence, Hauerwas can contend that the distinctiveness of the church from the world is not in opposition to the world but for the sake of the world, giving the “world the means to see itself truthfully” and offering an alternative vision.<sup>76</sup> For Hauerwas, this is not a withdrawal from the public sphere of ethical discourse rather it is locating the church in the midst of the world. This position does imply for the church a withdrawal of sorts. Not withdrawal from the world so much as from the church’s own Constantinian heritage or capitulation with the power elites of secular politics.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Rasmussen Ibid. p 211.

<sup>75</sup> Hauerwas PK p 100.

<sup>76</sup> Hauerwas PK p 101.

<sup>77</sup> Hauerwas AC p 16.

Hence, although Hauerwas is basically optimistic about the relationship between the church and the world, we still have to consider his pessimism about what he calls liberal society, because it is this liberal society which provides the criteria against which Hauerwas's sectarianism is measured. Hence the charge of sectarianism. Hauerwas's convictions about the historical and contingent nature of the world, suggests that states and societies which govern the world have taken many forms. In the present context Hauerwas's writings are placed against the background of liberal society.<sup>78</sup>

“[l]iberalism is the notion that there is a distinctive liberal way of life, characterised by the aspiration to increase and enhance the prerogatives of the individual; by maximal mobility in all directions, throughout every aspect of social life (in and out of particular communities, in and out of socio-economic classes and so on); and by a tendency to turn all areas of human activity into matters of consumer preference; a way of life based on progress, growth and technological dynamism. This liberal mode of existence is marked by tendencies toward universalism and even homogenization.”<sup>79</sup>

We have already seen how Hauerwas reacts against modernity thus characterised, because this vision is reinforced by violence and coercion and renders impossible any form of coherent ethical discourse. However, since reality is socially and historically constituted, there is no reason for the church or the individual to capitulate uncritically with the dominant situation just because the dominant account may be at

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<sup>78</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 1f & Hauerwas *Killing Compassion* DFTF pp 164 – 176. Here Hauerwas relates the virtue of compassion to modern, liberal theory. He quotes from Ronald Beiner *What's the Matter with Liberalism*. 1992 University of California Press, Berkeley. pp 10 – 14 & 22 – 23.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



odds with Christian convictions.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, if the church is not to capitulate, it must needs interpret in light of its own story and practices. The church, he says, has its own agenda and cannot, therefore, choose sides in contemporary conflicts.<sup>81</sup> The church, then, cannot but endeavour to maintain its independence from public language and accountability. By so doing the church provides "... the space and time necessary for developing skills of interpretation and discrimination sufficient to help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society."<sup>82</sup>

Nevertheless, as we have seen already, arguing from the point of view that all moral reasoning is radically contextual and narrative dependent, we can see that the charge of sectarianism against Hauerwas is still viable on the basis of character. It is clear that, for Hauerwas, moral notions "... describe only as we have purpose for such descriptions which means that they do not merely describe our activity; they also form it"<sup>83</sup> Therefore, these notions are purpose dependent and are embedded in, and so affected by, specific narratives. Consequently when such a notion is challenged it becomes extremely difficult to resolve the conflict. The conflict cannot be reduced to relations between the principles and the facts because perception is formed by different narratives that interpret these relationships differently. To reiterate a point

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<sup>80</sup> For an exposition of the dangers of capitulation see Hauerwas DFTF & AC p 142 where he talks about the education of Christians in liberal society. He says: "Christians ironically have entered into this grand educational project in the name of objectivity, the quest for the universal, and most of all societal peace. For education ... has ... as its purpose the suppression of minority voices in the interest of ironically fostering communication. It is true that past explicit Christian social orders suppressed dissenting voices, but it is even more the case today that the alleged pluralistic states of the present that profess to be guided by no visions of human nature or destiny are in fact ... guided by a very specific ideology of the Enlightenment."

<sup>81</sup> Hauerwas PK p 100, VV p 245.

<sup>82</sup> Hauerwas CC p 74.

<sup>83</sup> Hauerwas TT p 21.

made earlier, if we take justice as an example, as far as Hauerwas is concerned, outwith a narrative community we could not even assume that we share enough to know what justice might mean. This ignorance arises because we do not share enough of a common narrative to substantiate such an understanding. Understanding and discerning justice, as with all other moral notions, requires that we take up a distinctive way of life. Following MacIntyre, Hauerwas says talk of justice only makes sense when bolstered by more substantive moral language. This substantive language comes as a result of embracing substantive rationality that is tradition and narrative-dependent. Language dependent on the Christian tradition is Christian language that pertains to that narrative tradition, and access to it is necessarily limited for those outwith the tradition in which it is embedded. Access is limited to the extent to which they have not or cannot appropriate the distinctive way of life. Furthermore, a claim rooted in a particular history, set of events or tradition cannot justify itself as rational in any globalised sense.<sup>84</sup> An appeal to a particular tradition cannot be other than an appeal to authority that prohibits conversation by promoting conversion. If this is the case then there is no defence against the contention that no issue between conflicting traditions is rationally decidable and the charge of sectarianism is proven. However, Hauerwas is aware of this problem and since there is no way for him to argue against the charge and remain consistent, he attempts to transform a vice into a virtue.

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<sup>84</sup> This insight into the problem comes from Davis RMS p 77 "Is not reason essentially universal so that an appeal to reason is an appeal to universal criteria and arguments. An appeal to a particular ...tradition cannot be other...than an appeal to authority...then we have no defence against the relativist contention that no issue between conflicting traditions is rationally decidable."

For Hauerwas, developing people of virtue and discipleship within the church means that there is an inevitable exercise of authority.<sup>85</sup> It follows that if training in particular skills is desirable then authority is also necessary. This, Hauerwas points out, is true of every discipline, not just theology or moral reasoning. He says, “[B]y its very nature, then, authority seems to involve peoples’ willingness to accept the judgements of another as superior to their own on the basis of that person’s office and assumed skills.”<sup>86</sup> This understanding of authority presupposes a tradition with a shared vision of goods and practices. As such, and given Hauerwas’s understanding of practical reasoning, it does not necessarily imply or demand blind obedience. “We listen to the teacher and respect his authority because he speaks with greater understanding, greater wisdom, deeper experience, and more truly than do others.”<sup>87</sup> Discipline and authority are necessary but properly exercised they “... are hardly noticed as such.”<sup>88</sup> Exercised in such a manner authority should in fact encourage ethical discourse, rather than being a stumbling block to it by closing it down. Authority, well exercised, should “... direct others to go further, using what can be learned from tradition, afforded by the past, so that he or she can move towards the telos of fully perfected works.”<sup>89</sup> To understand authority in this way means that Hauerwas can see no conflict between authority and freedom, nor authority and reason. This is precisely because the tradition of shared practice and language renders these relationships intelligible. Hence Hauerwas’s ecclesial ethics can, in his terms, be sociologically possible, since every tradition that shapes us involves an appeal to

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<sup>85</sup> See Hauerwas TT pp195 – 197, CC pp 53 – 71 SP pp 39 – 62. AC pp 93 – 111.

<sup>86</sup> Hauerwas SP p 40.

<sup>87</sup> Hauerwas *Protestants and the Pope*. p 84.

<sup>88</sup> Hauerwas AC p107.

<sup>89</sup> Hauerwas AC p106.

authority. The primacy of the community of faith over any other tradition that might have an impact on shaping us, comes from the community of faith having a better understanding of the manner in which authority is exercised.

We return, therefore, to the question of genuine politics, or authentic political action, in the face of the contention that issues between conflicting traditions are rationally decidable. This is because the Enlightenment conceptualisation of reason and knowledge tied to systematic doubt, the ideal of personal autonomy and the critique of tradition, make positive accounts of authority and tradition unintelligible. Hence, Hauerwas's deploys an understanding of politics as gesture.<sup>90</sup> This idea stresses the importance of small actions. These are the small actions that take place in the everyday life and existence of individual Christians and churches. These small acts constitute a politic of, and concern about, the common life of the community. Hauerwas argues that it is through these small acts that people communicate, form and shape their world. It is, furthermore, through these small acts that a people of virtue is formed, and thus the potential to witness to the alternative politics of the kingdom is realised.<sup>91</sup> To give concrete form to this contention Hauerwas says:

“We must be a community with patience amid the division and the hatreds of this world, to take the time to nurture friendships, to serve the neighbor, and to give and receive the thousands of small acts of care which ultimately are the heart blood of the kingdom. That we must take time to help the neighbour in need, no matter how insignificant that neighbour or his or her need from the perspective of the world, is but a sign that we

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<sup>90</sup> Hauerwas CET p 106.

<sup>91</sup> Hauerwas CET p 105.

recognize that we are called not to make the history come out right but to be faithful to the kind of care that we have seen revealed in God's kingdom ... Nothing in life is more important than gestures, as gestures embody as well as sustain the valuable and significant. Through gestures we create and form our worlds ... In this sense, the church is but God's gesture on behalf of the world to create a space and time in which we might have a foretaste of the kingdom."<sup>92</sup>

In this light theology and ethics, for Hauerwas, should be a matter of helping us to see the significance of the everyday and the sacredness of the ordinary.<sup>93</sup>

It is the ordinary events that, for Hauerwas, embody a determinate challenge to the dominant, liberal culture. Consequently, to facilitate this challenge, it is Hauerwas's endeavour to see the church as a tactic for living in an alien environment, to "... better understand our situation as Christians today and to lead that situation in a positive and constructive manner."<sup>94</sup> By seeing the church as a tactic<sup>95</sup> he means "... a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delineation of exteriority provides it with the conditions necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other, thus it must play on and with the terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power."<sup>96</sup> Thus described, the idea of tactic

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<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas CET p 105 – 106.

<sup>93</sup> Hauerwas *Why Resident Aliens* p 424.

<sup>94</sup> Hauerwas AC pp 18 – 19.

<sup>95</sup> Here he is following Michel de Certeau who distinguishes between tactic and strategy and defines strategy as: "calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject that will empower ... can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its *own* and serve as a base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of competitors, enemies ... can be managed. ... it is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics and military strategy." AC pp 16 – 17.

<sup>96</sup> Hauerwas AC pp 17 – 18.

presents Hauerwas with a description of the art of the weak. It is his preferred position for the church, as he sees it. That is to say, the church is on alien or foreign ground. As such it must use the language resources and tools that are at hand, but not controlled or determined by the church. The church cannot withdraw from the public sphere because there is no place of its own to retreat to.<sup>97</sup> Finally, this is where the church has to abide both practically and theoretically. Unlike conventional military strategy, therefore, the political action that Hauerwas envisions for the church is the tactic of guerrilla warfare. As such the church is a counter-cultural enclave that does engage with society and the world at large. Moreover, Hauerwas has made a tactical virtue out of the strategic vice of sectarianism. Hence, despite or perhaps even because of the charge of sectarianism, Hauerwas leaves us with a church that is "... an island of one culture in the midst of another."<sup>98</sup>

### 5.2.2. *Embracing the Ecclesial Counter Culture.*

The preceding quotation from *Resident Aliens* epitomises Hauerwas's ecclesial position in relation to the nature and task of theology in the modern world. The book itself is addressed, for the most part to ministers of the church, who are not encouraged to respond to the needs of people in the sense of a helping profession. Rather, they are encouraged to contribute to the creation of a community. This community needs to be trained to be capable of hearing proclaiming and embodying a Christian perspective. By extension this presents a corrective to the whole church's ministry. The intention of this section is to explore this corrective, and on the way, the fourth and final sectarian criticism levelled at Hauerwas. That is to say of excessive

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<sup>97</sup> See notes 58 and 64 above.

<sup>98</sup> Hauerwas RA p 12.

christocentrism insofar as tying the communal identity so closely to Christ makes God into a tribal God and not recognisably the creator of the world.<sup>99</sup>

That is not to say, however, that Hauerwas is not aware of the demands of the culture outwith the church. He recognises that the church is not the only community in which Christians must participate. Indeed, there is much in the way of claims to truth and ultimate meaning outside the church. In the face of this Hauerwas claims that the basic insight and conviction of Christianity, understood as an Ecclesial ethic, helps us to appropriate critically the other narratives which have a claim on our lives. That Christianity can do this rests on the relationship between community and narrative, realisations about the contingent nature of reality. Coupled with Hauerwas's insight that there is no neutral standpoint outside history or outwith some narrative account of reality, these factors suggest a primacy, and a need to embrace the Ecclesial counter culture in order to:

“provide the means of recognising and critically appropriating other stories that claim our lives. For it is true that we always find ourselves enmeshed in many histories, of families, of Texas, of America ... each of

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<sup>99</sup> Similarly Milbank. “... Once theology gives up the claim to be a meta discourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, it is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol...” TST p 1. However, that is not to say that Milbank and Hauerwas agree on the manner in which this counter history, or meta narrative should be proclaimed. Hauerwas has his doubts about the grand scale of Milbank's narrative. Hauerwas fears that the grand scale of the narrative itself might be reproducing the violence of liberalism. (Hauerwas “Creation, Contingency and Truthful Non-Violence.” p 15, n 7. See too “The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ Her Lord.” p 35 n 3.) He fears that by responding to the totalising narrative of liberalism with another totalising narrative argument Milbank could well be in danger of presenting the Gospel as a system or a theory. (Ibid) This fear partly anticipates Davis's suggestion that despite claims to a rhetorical method, Milbank is presenting a grand argument. Hauerwas's preferred option, on the other hand, is piecemeal articulation augmented by authentic political presence witnessing to the Kingdom and the character of God through the politics of discipleship



which is constituted by many inter-related and confusing story lines. The moral task consists in acquiring the skills, i.e. the character, which enable us to negotiate these many levels of narrative.”<sup>100</sup>

This claim for the consistency and relevance of the Christian tradition, rests on the interplay of three related convictions: that is to say the narrative character of Christian convictions, the church as an interpretative community and the political dimension of reading the bible.<sup>101</sup>

We have already mentioned Hauerwas’s association with narrative theology, and noted that he is not a narrative theologian as such. However, narrative does play an important, if not central role in his theology. Hauerwas makes three related claims about narrative. Firstly, that it is the formal and most basic display of the existence of humanity and nature and the contingency of both. Second, that narrative is the characteristic mode of our self-understanding and our history of contingency. Third, he claims that God has revealed himself in the history of Israel and the life of the church.<sup>102</sup> With these three taken together, Hauerwas concludes that we come to know ourselves and to understand the world to the extent to which we learn to locate our histories in the story of God.<sup>103</sup> The role of the church, therefore, is to make the story of God heard. In so doing narrative renders the “... character of God” and “... renders us to be the kind of people appropriate to that character.”<sup>104</sup> Hauerwas

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<sup>100</sup> Hauerwas CC p 96, see also CET 64 n 17.

<sup>101</sup> Hauerwas US pp 13 – 44, CC 53 – 71. Negatively one might use the word superiority rather than consistency and relevance.

<sup>102</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 28ff, by way of comparison see Milbank *Theology and Social Theory* pp 259 – 277.

<sup>103</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 24 – 29.

<sup>104</sup> Hauerwas CC p 67.

must, as a result of this contention, stress the relationship between narrative and community. Interestingly, we can trace a development in Hauerwas's thought here. In his early work, his thought on the matter of narrative and community is much more abstract and this relationship far from explicit. His starting point on these abstract investigations was either from a phenomenology of moral experience,<sup>105</sup> or an analysis of how stories work.<sup>106</sup> In both of these examples the role of the church is minimal. Latterly, however, he has surrendered most of the formal claims made for narrative and concentrates on scriptural narrative. The stress is now on the rendering God in and through the community and narrative has become the servant of the church.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, he suggests that biblical narratives are only recognisable as scripture within the Christian church that he has brought to the fore.<sup>108</sup>

The church, therefore, is presented as the interpretative and interpreting community.<sup>109</sup> This notion reflects Hauerwas's interest in the work of Stanley Fish.<sup>110</sup> Hauerwas maintains that there is no objective meaning in texts that can be maintained outwith the context of the interpretative community. This interpretative community will, necessarily, have particular interpretative interests that render the text intelligible because what we perceive is always shaped by our interpretative acts. The church, or "... that community pledged constantly to work out and test the implications of the story of God, as known through Israel and Jesus Christ, for its common life and the

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<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas *Self as Story* VV pp 68 – 89.

<sup>106</sup> Hauerwas *Story and Theology* pp 69.

<sup>107</sup> Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p 133.

<sup>108</sup> Hauerwas CC.

<sup>109</sup> Hauerwas US 19 – 21.

<sup>110</sup> Hauerwas DTF p 5.

life of the world... ”<sup>111</sup> is the community wherein the bible as scripture can be properly interpreted. In this light, God’s story, the story of building up his people, can be heard. This position is, of course, laden with political implications. The bible, if it is not an objective text, must be understood differently. Hauerwas uses the example of the Pauline epistles that are transformed when they become part of the church’s scripture. Paul’s intentions as the author, though still of interest, are no longer as important.<sup>112</sup> Consequently, he argues that there is not one way of construing scripture inherent in the texts themselves. As a result Hauerwas must reconfigure the church’s use of the bible in terms of learning a craft under the tutelage of masters, the proper context of which is the liturgy and preaching of the church which in turn is in the interest and in the light of common discipleship<sup>113</sup>

This form of communitarian rationality depends, significantly, not on understanding how ideas work but on understanding how communities work. Hauerwas says:

“Practical reason is not a disembodied process based on abstract principles but the process of a community in which every member has a role to play. Such a process does not disdain the importance of logical rigour for

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<sup>111</sup> Hauerwas PK p 87.

<sup>112</sup> Hauerwas US pp 20, 151, and CC 64 – 66.

<sup>113</sup> On this point Rasmussen cites Nicholas Lash as the provider of an understanding of the use of scripture as performance which is broadly in line with Hauerwas’s thought. “... the fundamental form of the Christian interpretation of scripture is, in the concrete, the life, activity and organisation of the Christian community, and that Christian practice consists ... in the performance or enactment of the biblical text: in its ‘active reinterpretation’.” Rasmussen *Church as Polis* p 205.

aiding in their deliberation, but logic cannot be a substitute for the actual process of discernment.”<sup>114</sup>

The way communities work, is through practical reason, or a process of discernment which in turn is shaped by the virtues or character of the community. Further to this, practical reasoning, he says, should be the activity of the whole community, not merely the function of the expert theologian or biblical scholar.<sup>115</sup> Readings and interpretations of the bible are informed by the church as an interpretative community with particular strategies in mind which themselves derive from the character of the community. This in turn will affect the pertinence of the readings and the statements derived from that reading. The church's ties to liberal polity will, consequently, diminish the possibility of correct readings or interpretations of the bible since these ties will diminish the interpretative community's ability to hold fast to its specifically Christian interpretative agenda. The very fact that the church might ask how to relate the bible to ethics betrays its hostage status. This attitude, Hauerwas suggests, assumes the given-ness of liberal politics and in turn necessitates the question of relevance.<sup>116</sup> The truth, for Hauerwas is precisely an inversion of this state of affairs. The bible's relevance is not to the world but to the church. The church as counter culture allows for a critical reading of the dominant culture. Thus the question ought to be how is the bible relevant to the church as the interpretative community? Inevitably this is a political question.

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<sup>114</sup> Hauerwas CET p 73 (67 – 87), PK pp 130 – 134, CC p 54.

<sup>115</sup> Hauerwas PK p 134.

<sup>116</sup> Hauerwas US p 39.

The answer to this question brings us back to the significance that Hauerwas gives to sacraments and liturgy in his understanding of the church. The bible is only properly understood in connection with a church as a liturgical and sacramental community. The authority of scripture, then, is intelligible insofar as it is located within “a community that knows its life depends on faithful remembering of God’s care of his creation through the calling of Israel and the life of Jesus.”<sup>117</sup>

### 5.2.3. *The Church as Community of Character.*

Finally, the church is for Hauerwas an alternative culture.<sup>118</sup> Consequently the church is faced with a political challenge. That is to say, in the contemporary context how does the church live in light of the story of Jesus Christ?<sup>119</sup> According to Hauerwas the church is called to witness to the reality that is the kingdom of God, making public the “...politics of the kingdom that reveals the insufficiency of all politics based on coercion and falsehood and finds the true source of power in servanthood rather than dominion.”<sup>120</sup> In effect this means, as we have observed, that the church doesn’t have a social ethic but is a social ethic. If the church adopts the understanding of politics abroad in the world, even the most humanitarian, it is surrendering its own distinctive politics and, therefore its ability to witness to the kingdom of God. The church, for Hauerwas, is the locus and springboard for all Christian ethics. In principle, the church embodies an ethic for all people everywhere,

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<sup>117</sup> Hauerwas CC p 53.

<sup>118</sup> Moltmann would describe this model of the church as a contrast society containing contrast stories and practices. Rasmussen *Church as Polis* compares and contrasts Moltmann’s political theology with Hauerwas’s theological politics.

<sup>119</sup> Hauerwas RA p 112 – 114.

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas PK p 102.

but insofar as yet not everyone acknowledges the supremacy of the Christian story, it only extends to those who are the people of God.

Hauerwas's understanding of authentic politics as well as his account of practices and virtues in the communal life, provide ecclesial ethics with the conceptual resources for understanding everyday life. In so-doing everyday life becomes for him what the focus of political activity should be just as much, if not more, than national politics. To this extent, Hauerwas does not approach the church with either a sociological or theological definition.<sup>121</sup> He does not say, for instance, that the church is the community of saints, nor does he suggest that the church is a specific human community, constituted for a specific religious purpose.<sup>122</sup> Rather, he assesses the concrete activities and practices which gives the church its identity as the church. Whenever these activities and practices are to be found there too is the church to be found. Equally, the extent to which these activities and practices are not to be found is the extent to which the church is absent or compromised.

These activities and practices or marks of the church, that is preaching and the sacraments, are augmented for Hauerwas by the life of Christians. These three things together define the church. The sacraments are particularly important since they frame the understanding that the story of Jesus is to be enacted as well as told. The church then:

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<sup>121</sup> Hütter "The Ecclesial Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas". *Dialog* 30 Summer 1991 pp 231 – 241.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid* p 233.

“... is constituted by word and sacrament as the story we tell, the story we embody, must not only be told but enacted. In telling we are challenged to be a people capable of hearing God’s good news such that we can be a witness to others. In the enactment, in Baptism and Eucharist, we are made part of a common history which requires continuous celebration to be rightly remembered. Through this telling and enactment we, like Israel, become peculiarly a people who live by our remembering the history of God’s redemption of the world.”<sup>123</sup>

Hauerwas further emphasises the significance of the sacraments by describing them as the essential rites of our church politics.<sup>124</sup> Hütter suggests, critically, that notwithstanding the central place Hauerwas has given to the sacraments, he has missed the central theological point of them. That is to say that while Hauerwas holds them to be our most important social witness to the extent that “... these liturgies are our effective social work. For if the church is rather than has a social ethic, these actions are our most important social witness...”<sup>125</sup> he neglects to point out the manner in which, in their performance they communicate God’s reconciling activity.<sup>126</sup> We shall return to explore these themes in more depth in the next chapter. For the moment it is sufficient that we take note of them.

In the meantime, we return to the form the church takes through the communal life of its members. As we have seen the church is known by the character of the people who constitute it. Further, the extent to which this character is in

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<sup>123</sup> Hauerwas CET p 53.

<sup>124</sup> Hauerwas PK p 108.

<sup>125</sup> Hauerwas PK p 108.

<sup>126</sup> Hütter op cit. p 234.



evidence is the mark of the truthfulness of the church's witness. Consequently, the shape of the church reflects the patterns of the coexistence of its members and this, in turn, is determined by their character as disciples. The key to understanding the shape of the church with regard to this third characteristic lies in the first characteristic, which is to say, Hauerwas's understanding of the church as a body which performs the sacraments. To this end, Hauerwas notes that the kind of holiness which he is describing and which mark the church:

“...is not that of moral perfection, but the holiness of people who have learned not to fear one another and thus are capable of love. We do not go ahead with our own meals, or our lives, but have learned to live in the presence of others without fear and envy. We thus become a perfect people through the meal we share with our Lord. We learn that forgiveness of the enemy, even when the enemy is ourselves, is the way God would have his kingdom accomplished.”<sup>127</sup>

From this we can extrapolate the pattern of the church as acceptance of forgiveness and willingness to forgive, and reconciliation.

These, of course, are not one-off events and Hauerwas is also concerned with the church as an institution across time. Thus holiness and character are brought together for him when considering virtue. Virtue, in this sense means those particular goods relevant to the practices that are “... necessary for remembering and telling the story of a crucified savior.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, while mentioning hope and patience as specific

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<sup>127</sup> Hauerwas PK p 110.

<sup>128</sup> Hauerwas PK p 103.

features of this community,<sup>129</sup> he argues that the virtues form a particular disposition, acquired by acting in a particular way and reflecting the character of the person. By extension, this character shapes the community and the church in its attitude to the public sphere. Moreover, the church becomes the training ground for men and women of virtue to be built up in this character which tends toward holiness as described above.

Finally, all of the virtue and character and marks of the church are to be properly understood only in light of the new *telos* promised by the kingdom of God to which the church is a witness. That is to say that Hauerwas recognises the eschatological dimension of the kingdom to which the church is required to be faithful. Thus "...we are an eschatological people who base our lives on the knowledge that God has redeemed his creation through the work of Jesus Christ. We thus live out of control in the sense that we must assume God will use our faithfulness to make his kingdom a reality..."<sup>130</sup> The overriding virtue, for Hauerwas arises at this point in that this new *telos* means that the church and individual Christians are to live "... out of control."<sup>131</sup> By this he means that Christians are no longer called to be effective political agents so much as we are called to be faithful to the kingdom. We are, he says, liberated from concerning ourselves with making history come out right. Instead we are called to the responsibility of witnessing to the kingdom.

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<sup>129</sup> Rasmussen notes that Hauerwas has no where given a list of virtues which could characterise the church but does emphasis hope and patience in CC p127, PK 103 – 106, & CET 199 – 219. *The Church as Polis*. p 198.

<sup>130</sup> Hauerwas PK p 105.

<sup>131</sup> Hauerwas PK p 105.

Clearly this will have profound significance for our political activities in the public sphere. In witnessing truthfully to the peaceable kingdom, we cannot realise justice or peace through force or coercion. Neither can the church allow injustice to carry on unresolved, because the peaceable kingdom is a kingdom of justice which is concerned with the well being of the neighbour.<sup>132</sup> This disposition, Hauerwas claims, requires the Christian to become the "... most political of all animals."<sup>133</sup> Consequently the church will be the most political of all institutions, since the practice of peaceableness requires policies practices and institutions to make possible non-violent confrontation and resolution of conflict which marks the worlds politics. In short, Christians are politically active, in and in light of the politics of the kingdom, wherein and whereby they are understood to be "... a community which tries to develop the resources to stand within the moral witnessing to the peaceable kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world."<sup>134</sup> And this is because "[p]olitics as the art of the maintenance of a good society is the art that is at the heart of being a Christian."<sup>135</sup>

In conclusion, we can see how, for Hauerwas, as it was for Davis, community, identity and political action relate to each other on the basis of a theological representation of philosophical antecedents. In this chapter we have explored Hauerwas's relationship to MacIntyre but noting also the differences. We then explored the component parts of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics that led us into a discussion of the nature and task of theology with reference to Christian ethics and

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<sup>132</sup> Hauerwas PK p 146.

<sup>133</sup> Hauerwas CET p 96.

<sup>134</sup> Hauerwas PK p 102.

<sup>135</sup> Hauerwas TT p 143.

the church. In the final analysis we can say that the promise of ecclesial ethics is in the realisation of living out of control in witness to the kingdom. Hence the nature and task of theology, for Hauerwas, is to realise the promise implicit in ecclesial ethics. That is to say it is to realise the tactical deployment of the art of maintaining a good society subject to the witness of the peaceable kingdom. In other words it is the authentic political activity of maintaining the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common.

### 5.3 Summary

In this chapter we have explored the implications of Hauerwas's post-liberal ecclesial ethics for Christian ethics and the church. We did this by examining Hauerwas's idea of authentic politics understood as the conversation necessary for people to discover the goods they have in common. This took us through questions of religious identity, identity and the Christian tradition and plurality and the role of revelation. In the final analysis, the impact of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics on Christian ethics is to construe appropriate response to God's revelation in the church as the ongoing presence of Christ in the world. This presence has significant political and social consequences. From here we went on to analyse the implications of ecclesial ethics for the church. We continued our exploration of authentic political action. Here we revisited the charge of sectarianism and noted that Hauerwas's authentic political action was akin to the tactics of guerrilla warfare. From there we examined the possibilities of embracing the ecclesial counterculture and finally portrayed the church as a community of Christian character.

At this point we have adequate understanding of what Davis and Hauerwas mean by authentic political action, in terms of the promises of their respective theologies, as well as the sort of community the church needs to be in light of these theologies. We shall now move on to a critical attempt to redeem the promises of both Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. In the meantime we should draw together some threads to highlight the common ground shared by Davis and Hauerwas in light of these promises. We have seen that both Davis and Hauerwas are concerned with five similar issues. Firstly, the modern privatisation of religious conviction. This flows from the second area of concern that is the incoherence or excesses of modernity as the context for the church and its practices, both being sceptical about the merits or effectiveness of so called political theology as a response to this situation. The third point of shared concern is that the contemporary context has forced a divide between theory and practice generally, and in particular for the Christian tradition. This results in other familiar theological dichotomies such as reason and faith, reason and revelation, reason and tradition. The fourth point is that for a proper realignment of theory and practice we need to rediscover a more effective understanding of tradition and narrative. Fifth and finally, this realignment should issue in a practical ecclesiology that ought to facilitate authentic political action. That this is shared ground does not, however, overlook the fact that the conclusions which Davis and Hauerwas reach, and the promises implied, appear on the face of it to be at odds with each other. In the next chapter we shall develop the idea of shared concern as we take up Davis's Community of Discourse and Hauerwas's Community of Character and test them against a model ecclesiology in an attempt to redeem the promises of critical theology and ecclesial ethics.

Charles Davis's Critical Theology and Stanley Hauerwas's Ecclesial Ethics:  
Discourse and Character and the Church's Political Action

## Section 4

Redeeming Conversations?

Redeeming the Promises of Creative Disaffiliation

## **Chapter 6: Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Up to this point in the thesis we have explored Charles Davis's critical theology and Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. I have argued that a necessary condition in Davis's case for authentic political activity and Hauerwas's case for authentic political presence in the public sphere was a normative community of faith. Both Davis and Hauerwas understand the church properly reconfigured as able to provide that community. For Davis the church is reconfigured as a community of discourse, appealing to critical reason as understood by Habermas. For Hauerwas the church was reconfigured as a community of character based on an appeal to substantive reason and the authority of tradition as described by MacIntyre. So, with these ecclesial theological claims in mind we return to the original dilemma of the choice between reason and tradition.

It is by now clear that, in fact, the debate is not one between reason and no reason, rather it concerns competing conceptions of traditions of rationality. Given this understanding we have to ask if the church is best understood according to Davis or according to Hauerwas. That is to say, can the church be seen as a community of discourse? If so, does Davis's community of discourse coincide with any recognisable ecclesiology? Similarly, can the church be seen as a community of character? If so, does Hauerwas's Community of character coincide with any recognisable



ecclesiology? It is my intention, in this chapter, to answer these questions. This will be done by, first of all, defining the church as an assembly and as a confessing community, in light of the biblical passage Matthew 18:20. This definition presents itself as the most obvious one to use for two reasons. Firstly, the interest in the church's political action that motivates this thesis, focuses as we have seen on the relationship between persons, community and political action. Such a focus means that we must consider the vision and practice of these communities. Secondly, Volf maintains that, while it was the post-Reformation churches that gave specific systematic weight to this passage, it has a long and noble history in reflection on the church from the time of the Fathers.<sup>1</sup> Hence, this definitive description is not a random choice but one that will allow us to flesh out the substance of the communities that Davis and Hauerwas describe in respect of their own writings on ecclesiology, such as it is. Having tested Davis's community of discourse and Hauerwas's community of character against this control model, we will be in a position to compare the two communities directly, like for like. Hence, the conclusion will show that this test actually provides a mandate for placing Davis and Hauerwas together in order to provide an effective check and balance each for the other. This will echo Davis's suggestion that mystical-pragmatic Christianity, in effect the normative model suggested by his critical theological community of discourse, has always provided an effective counter to the 'ontological pretensions of the mythical-visionary model' which is the type that best describes Hauerwas's community of character.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Volf *After Our Likeness; The Church as the Image of the Trinity*. 1998. William B. Eerdmans. Michigan/Cambridge. p 136.

<sup>2</sup> Another model for analysis did suggest itself but I decided that it did not meet the requirements of this thesis. I had intended to explore an apparently useful device namely Ernst Troeltsch's church sect typology in an attempt to quantify the respective communities (Ernst Troeltsch *The Social teaching of the Christian churches*. 1931. Allen & Unwin. London [2 vols.]). Indeed this typology has been invoked

## 6.2. Returning to the Dilemma and Testing Cases

I begin, therefore, by presenting a control model of the church in order to assess the ecclesial identity of Davis's community of discourse and Hauerwas's community of character. To this end, I shall outline briefly a model presented by Mirosław Volf and derived from Matthew 18:20.<sup>3</sup> This model is particularly useful since it is distilled from an encounter between Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Reformed ecclesiology.

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by both Davis (Davis WLWD pp 53, 96 & 104) and Hauerwas (Hauerwas *The Ethicist as Theologian* pp 411. *The Future of Christian Social Ethics* pp129f. VV p 214, TT p 215) at various times and to varying degrees of success. Troeltsch's description, however, provides us with an external description of the identification of the church when, to assess fully Davis's and Hauerwas's position, we require an internal description of the identity of the church. Troeltsch says that "... both types [church and sect] are a logical result of the Gospel and only conjointly do they exhaust the whole range of its sociological influence." (Troeltsch Ibid p 340). Which is to say that if the gospel has a social influence it is not adequately represented by only one type, since the history of the Christian tradition shows that the church has understood itself as either one or the other types and sometimes even both. Which brings us back to Davis and Hauerwas. In Chapter 3 we outlined the models of the church that Davis works with. It is clear that these models owe a great deal in their inception to Troeltsch's types, although, he remains critical of them. Broadly speaking, Davis's agenda of recreating society in light of a transformative faith wherein the task of the critical theologian is to equip Christians to contribute to this recreation, places him in opposition to Hauerwas and, therefore, apparently in the church type. And yet, invoking the church sect typology is not that straightforward for Davis. He does not fall neatly into the church type, but rather draws on the 'mystical' and picks up on his understanding of a pragmatic model of Christianity. We needed, therefore, to find a more adequate means of assessing this position. As for Hauerwas, in Chapter 5 we said that in spite of, or even because of, charges of sectarianism he continues to present a community of faith which is radically different from the world. Indeed, he maintains explicitly the church sect typology in his early writings, as a useful device, expressing sympathy for the sectarian position. In his later writings, however, Hauerwas has rejected the use of the term sectarian because of the political and social agenda that the term implies. Thus he can say that the contemporary use of the term sectarian denotes a person who will not "... 'act responsibly' for building a just society." (Hauerwas US p 154. For further articulations of his current position see AN p 7, CET pp 1 – 18 & 113, RA pp 39 – 43 & 155, AC pp 16 – 19). Insofar as his first priority is not to make society just then Hauerwas is, indeed a sectarian and, therefore, at one level Troeltsch's type serves a useful descriptive purpose. On the other hand, as we saw in Chapter 5, such a description is woefully inadequate for capturing the nuances of Hauerwas's thought. Again, we needed to find a more adequate means of assessing his position.

<sup>3</sup> Volf p 130.

6.2.1. *A Control Model for Testing Ecclesial Identity*

Volf takes as his starting point the biblical passage “... where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”<sup>4</sup> From this, Volf determines two characteristic conditions of ecclesiality, that is to say assembly and confession.<sup>5</sup> He says “... [t]he church is first of all an assembly ... but an assembly is not yet the church. An indispensable condition of ecclesiality is that the people *assemble in the name of Christ*.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, in order to generate our control model we shall, following Volf, deal in turn with these two characteristics, namely assembly and confession. In dealing primarily with these questions we shall frame a concise discussion of the credal marks of the church, namely unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity.

As an assembly, the church represents a “... visible assembly of visible persons at a specific place for specific action.”<sup>7</sup> Volf takes the focus of this expression to be the people. The church is not simply the act of assembling, it is also “... the *people* who in a specific way assemble at a specific place.” From this he concludes that assembly is constitutive of ecclesiality.<sup>8</sup> Considering the New Testament appropriation of the Greek ἐκκλησία (ecclesia), Volf notes that whereas in secular Greek usage, ecclesia referred to the assembly of free citizens of a city, in Pauline writing ecclesia has developed two senses. First it had come to refer exclusively to the “... concrete assembly of Christians at a specific place.”<sup>9</sup> Volf takes this specificity of place to refer to the locally congregated people where it “... is the body of Christ in the particular

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<sup>4</sup> Volf p 136 quoting Matthew 18:20.

<sup>5</sup> Volf pp 137ff & 145ff.

<sup>6</sup> Volf Ibid. His emphasis.

<sup>7</sup> Otto Weber cited by Volf Ibid p 137.

<sup>8</sup> Volf Ibid p 137.

<sup>9</sup> Volf Ibid p 137.

locale in which it gathers together.”<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, the concrete local church is not the extent of this aspect of the definition. The early church had a particular eschatological self-understanding. That is to say:

“... it understood itself ‘as the company elected by God and determined by him to be the center and crystallization point of the eschatological Israel now being called into existence by him.’ When Paul later uses the term ἐκκλησία του θεου ... as a designation for the church of Jewish and gentile Christians, he is preserving this eschatological horizon. ... Christians are the eschatological people of God assembling themselves from all the nations at particular places.”<sup>11</sup>

It is in this respect that the second sense of ecclesia becomes evident. That is to say, a particular understanding of the universal church comes about in the New Testament. Thus the term ecclesia has come to designate both local congregation and universal church in light of its eschatological self-understanding. Volf says “... [a]s the universal church the ἐκκλησία is the ‘heavenly’ church gathered around the resurrected Christ in anticipation of the its eschatological consummation.”<sup>12</sup> The universal church, understood eschatologically, is not the same as the universal church understood as the accretion of local churches or total number of Christians. The relationship between these two positions is not easily resolved.<sup>13</sup> Volf rightly points out that this relationship raises a significant question for conceptions of church unity revolving around the question of what is theologically primary, the universal or the local church. He points out that taking the local church as the primary understanding of

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<sup>10</sup> Volf Ibid p 138. He makes this assertion on the basis of Romans 12<sup>5</sup>, 1 Corinthians 12<sup>12-13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Volf Ibid p 139. The internal quotation comes from Jürgen Roloff *ἐκκλησία* An Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament 1993 Eerdmans. Michigan. The Greek term church of God, Volf claims, is the expanded version of the simple ecclesia in Paul’s writings.

<sup>12</sup> Volf Ibid p 139.

<sup>13</sup> Volf Ibid pp 139 – 141.

ecclesia, then the "... *communio sanctorum* emerges through the addition of many local churches; the whole eschatological people of God is a sum of all the local churches in which individual Christians have gathered together."<sup>14</sup> On the other hand giving primacy to the universal church implies an emphasis on the *communio sanctorum* at the expense of the visible church and in favour of the invisible.

In response to this Volf embarks on an analysis of the traditional understanding of the church as the body of Christ. He says "... [t]he alleged relation of actualization between universal church and local church as well as the notion of the identity of the two is grounded in a certain understanding of the relation between Christ and the church."<sup>15</sup> Traditionally, Christ and the church were held to be one; the church and Christ representing an organic relationship constituting a single person.<sup>16</sup> From this notion flows the theological claim that Christ is the subject of the church and the church adopts the subjectivity of Christ. Therefore, as Christ is present in the local church so too is the universal church present. This view gives priority to the local. Volf advocates, however, a different, 'non-organic' reading of this situation which concludes with the assertion that the church "... both the universal *communio sanctorum* and the local church, is not a collective subject, but rather a communion of persons."<sup>17</sup> As such, the church represents a collectivity of people who as a communion are interdependent in two ways:

"First, they live only insofar as Christ lives in them through the Spirit (see Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 6:19). Second, the Christ lives in them through the multiple relations

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<sup>14</sup> Volf Ibid p 139.

<sup>15</sup> Volf Ibid p 141.

<sup>16</sup> Volf attributes the origin of this view to Augustine and notes that both Ratzinger and Zizioulas, two outstanding contemporary writers on ecclesiology, have appropriated this understanding. p 141

<sup>17</sup> Volf Ibid p 145.

they have with one another (see 1 Cor. 12: 12 – 13). Yet even though Christians are bound into this complex network of relationships, they still remain subjects; indeed, their being subjects is inconceivable without these relationships (see Gal. 2:20). This is why one must also conceive the ‘one’ who Christians are in Christ (Gal. 3:28; see Eph. 2:14 – 16) not as a ‘unified person’ who has ‘transcended all differentiation,’ but rather precisely as a differentiated unity, as a communion of those who live in Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence, Volf concludes, the universal church is not a subject that acts in the local church. Neither is it identical with the local church. It is, rather, the interconnection of local churches in Christ that configures the entire church as a prolepsis of the eschatological gathering of the people of God. This configuration represents a notion of the church as an assembly that, at a local level connects every church with all other churches of God.

Understanding the church as an assembly, however, is not in itself a sufficient condition of ecclesiality since an indispensable condition of ecclesiality is the action of gathering in Christ’s name. “In order to be a church,” Volf contends “... the people must assemble *in the name of Christ*. In so doing, they attest that he is the ‘determining ground’ of their lives; in him they have found freedom orientation and power.”<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup> Volf Ibid p 145. This conclusion follows a reading of Heon-Wook Park, Robert Gundry and John A. T. Robinson. He suggests that if we do not assume to understand the church as identical with the earthly body of Christ then we are using the term body metaphorically. This includes the interpretation whereby the church is taken to be identical with the resurrected body of Christ. Thus a body which consists of a grouping of individual persons can only be a body in a figurative sense. Volf says that “the question whether or not Paul is using the body of Christ metaphorically is falsely put; the only correct query concerns the referent for that metaphor.”

<sup>19</sup> Volf Ibid p 146. Volf maintains that the church gathers first of all to call upon Christ as *saviour* and in so doing to bear witness to him in front of others so gathered, and thence witness to the world. Secondly, the church gathers to call upon and profess Christ as *Lord* of the church and the universe under whose authority and in obedience to whom they act. Thirdly, assembling in Christ’s name the church acknowledge him as the “power in which they live” since Christ is Immanuel, *God with them*.



conditions of ecclesiality, therefore, demand and depend upon certain confessional and doctrinal articulations without which the church cannot exist. It is outwith the scope of this thesis to delve into the world of doctrinal argument and specification. Nevertheless, we can note that these confessional and doctrinal articulations can present two conditions of ecclesiality for our consideration. That is to say, they present an understanding of the church as *communio fidelium* and the related matter of the commitment of the assembly.

“The church is essentially a *communio fidelium*, whatever else it may be beyond this.”<sup>20</sup> Without faith the church is not the church. That is not to say that the church’s ecclesiality rests solely on the faith of the individual and thence imputed to the assembly. “The church exists even if I do not believe; yet without at least some believing, there can be no church, and in this sense the existence of the church is bound to the faith of its members in Christ as their Savior and Lord.”<sup>21</sup> This in turn raises the second consideration, which is the commitment of the assembly to allow their lives to be determined by their faith in Christ. Rather than talking of the relationship between works and faith as the index of commitment, Volf is more inclined to discuss “... the path of *imitatio*.”<sup>22</sup> The church is not a club ‘of the perfect’ but a communion of individuals who confess themselves to be sinners and, in acknowledging Christ as Lord, place themselves under the power of the Spirit. In

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<sup>20</sup> Volf Ibid p 147.

<sup>21</sup> Volf Ibid p 147.

<sup>22</sup> Volf Ibid p 148. “Radicalizing the Calvinist tradition, the Free churches originally took as their point of departure the assertion that faith without fruit is dead; where there is no fruit, there is no true faith, and where there is no true neither is there a church. This ecclesiological use of the *sylogismus practicus* is correct insofar as no common ground exists between God and mammon (Matt 6:24), between justice and injustice, ... Yet the self-appointed church of the saints inevitably degenerates into a self-righteous church of hypocrites. If the connection between faith and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22 – 23) is to be preserved while simultaneously avoiding hypocrisy, it is better to speak of the necessary *commitment* of believers to take the path *imitatio*.”



confessing faith, the personal identification with Christ coincides with cognitive specification. Volf suggests that “[w]ithout personal identification with Jesus Christ, cognitive specification of who he is remains empty; without cognitive specification of who Jesus Christ is, however, personal identification with him is blind.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the means of articulating a profession of faith says something about the person and work of Christ. Thus “Jesus is Lord” or “Jesus is Saviour” refers to the work of Christ and without this dimension, what Volf calls “... the cognitive dimension essential for faith itself ...”<sup>24</sup> confession would be impossible.

On the other hand, confession itself “... consists less in verbalizing a particular theological content than in acknowledging that which the content of the confession is identifying.”<sup>25</sup> Volf suggests that this describes the performative aspect of confession. Thus to say, for instance “Jesus is Lord” is for one to acknowledge “... the crucified Christ ‘as the Lord whom God raised from the dead and elevated to ... [Lord of All],’ subordinate[s] himself or herself to his rule, and ‘presents to him praise and homage calling upon his name.’”<sup>26</sup> Hence to make a statement of confession is also to perform a speech act that commits the speaker to that which is acknowledged in the confession, in the sense that one is expressing commitment which in turn manifests itself as a way of life as well as association.

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<sup>23</sup> Volf Ibid p 148.

<sup>24</sup> Volf Ibid p 149.

<sup>25</sup> Volf Ibid p 149. Volf makes this suggestion quoting Hans Von Campenhausen who suggests that the history of confessions shows a change in emphasis. Early ones focused on Christ's work while later ones e.g. 1 John focus on the essence of his person. *Das Bekenntnis im Urchristentum*. Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft. 63 (1972): 210 – 253.

<sup>26</sup> Volf Ibid p 149.

A further dimension to be considered with regard to confession, as a declaration of faith, is the public and social nature of confession. The etymology alone suggests confession in the presence of someone as well as to someone. When contextualised within the understanding of church as assembly of the universal and local church we have a broader context within which the communicative acts of Christians are to be understood. Hence, confession is not restricted to formulaic expressions. Rather, every act of Christian communication is "... at least formally and implicitly, an act of confession."<sup>27</sup> It is in and through this that the church manifests itself as the church. This understanding of confession extends to the daily life of individual members of the church as well as to the more stylised expressions of the singing of hymns and the ritual practice of the sacraments wherein and whereby the church, those gathered in the name of Christ, speak the word of God to each other and to the world.<sup>28</sup> Thus, Volf suggests, echoing Luther, "... the pluriform speaking of the word is *the central constitutive mark of the church*."<sup>29</sup> In this regard even the sacraments, rather than being constitutive of the church, can only be a condition of ecclesiality insofar as they constitute a public profession and confession of faith that is performative and determines commitment.<sup>30</sup> That is to say, only insofar as the sacraments represent a public display of remembrance and proclamation, can they be understood to operate as instruments of God's activity in and through the church.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Volf Ibid p 150.

<sup>28</sup> Volf Ibid p 150.

<sup>29</sup> Volf Ibid p 150. Quotes Luther's *Werke* 50.692.28 – 30. "Wherever you hear such words and see *preaching, believing, confessing and commensurate behavior*, you can be sure that an *ecclesia sancta catholica* must be there." His emphasis

<sup>30</sup> Volf Ibid p 153.

<sup>31</sup> Volf Ibid pp 153 – 154. "First they are a public representation of such confession; in baptism the person baptised professes publicly faith in him in whose name baptism occurs (see Heb. 10:23), and the ecclesial praise of God and God's salvific activity is constitutive of the Lord's Supper (*αναμνησις* [remembrance] and *χαταγγελλειν* [proclamation] in 1 Cor. 11:25 – 26). Second, the mediation of salvific grace through the sacraments is bound to the faith of those receiving them. ... Although celebration of the sacraments are certainly not a product of faith, they can be what they are *for the persons who receive*

“There is no church without the sacraments; but there are no sacraments without the confession of faith and without faith itself. The church is wherever those who are assembled, and be they only two or three, within the framework of their pluriform confession of faith profess faith in Christ as their Saviour and Lord through baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus we have a definition of the church as assembly and as confessional. So far we have explored a localised understanding of the operation of these conditions. This localised understanding means that the confession of faith is a condition of ecclesiality “... internal to a local church; it is an intraecclesial event when a congregation professes faith in Christ before the world.”<sup>33</sup> In other words it represents a confession among people gathered at a specific place. It is not sufficient, however, that the confession is the “... idiosyncratic act of a local church.”<sup>34</sup> If the confession is to be a condition of the whole church then it has to be a confession constitutive of every church. In so doing it distinguishes and identifies the church in the world and connects every local congregation that is likewise distinguished and identified. This point raises an interesting comparative doctrinal point whereby we have to ask if the same confession will suffice for all denominations.<sup>35</sup> Volf asks “... will the same confession of faith suffice, as often seems to be view in the Free church tradition. Or is a fellowship already separated from Christ and also from its own ecclesiality insofar as it lives separate from the larger church, as Cyprian and ... both the Orthodox and

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*them*, namely, instruments of God’s activity and to that extent also constitutive for the church, only if they are indeed received in faith.” The ongoing debate about infant or adult baptism is not relevant here, except to say that, given Volf’s position the same general conditions apply.

<sup>32</sup> Volf *Ibid* p 154.

<sup>33</sup> Volf *Ibid* p 154.

<sup>34</sup> Volf *Ibid* p 154.

<sup>35</sup> Volf *Ibid* p 154.

Catholic traditions believe?”<sup>36</sup> An in-depth exposition of this question is outwith the scope of this thesis. We may, however, make two observations in order to clarify the situation in terms of the definition that we seek. First of all, we should consider the practical import of this question. How, in fact, are the various churches connected at the confessional level and are they able to express practically this unity? In response, since *intraecclesial* conditions of unity are not sufficient to guarantee unity, Volf suggests that an *inter-ecclesial* openness to other churches should be considered an indispensable condition of ecclesiality. By this he means that:

“Since the eschatological gathering of the people of God, whose foretaste is the local church, is not identical with all churches of the past and present, the ecclesiality of a local church need not depend on the sacramental relation to them. Yet since the eschatological gathering of the people of God will include all these churches as its own anticipations, a local church cannot alone, in isolation from all other churches, claim to be a church. It must acknowledge all other churches, in time and space, as churches, and must at least be open to diachronic and synchronic communication with them.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus a confession of faith, emanating from a local church, must at least bear an additional characteristic to the extent that it does not expressly isolate that local congregation from other local congregations and, therefore, other churches. It is possible that a congregation can make a profession of faith without “... positive

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<sup>36</sup> Volf Ibid p 154 - 156. “In the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, the constitutive presence of Christ is given only with the presence of the bishop standing in *communio* with all bishops in time and space. ... only in this way can the ‘whole Christ,’ head and members, in the local church be ensured, a presence that as such makes a local church into a church. ... Neither can the Free church thesis concerning a *direct* presence of Christ in the church apply here since it either misunderstands the character of the mediation of faith, or mistakenly presupposes that the constitutive presence of Christ is something other than the presence of Christ in the hearts of believers manifesting itself externally.”

<sup>37</sup> Volf Ibid p 157.

connections with other congregations but not in express isolation from them.”<sup>38</sup> Openness to all other churches thus becomes the minimum interecclesial condition by which the confessing assembly, in fact becomes fully participant in the proleptic congregation of God’s people, and not a religious club. Furthermore, the relationships between individuals that manifest the common Christ, are extrapolated into relationships between churches. As such these relationships reflect the differentiated unity of the body of Christ. Secondly, we must reinforce a point made by Volf and anticipate some possible criticism of this control definition of the church. That is to say that in the final analysis we are talking not about the one church but about a plurality of churches.<sup>39</sup> That this is the case cannot and should not be denied. To understand the church as a *communio* is to embody and express the New Testament term κοινονία more accurately. That is to say, historically, the ‘one’ church has always been the communion of churches which is not in itself a church. This is particularly true in the contemporary context in which church and state are largely separated and there is a degree of local differentiation among even established churches.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, therefore we can present our control definition of the church as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> Volf Ibid p 157. “By isolating itself from other churches, a church attests either that it is professing faith in ‘a different Christ’ than do the latter, or is denying in practice the *common* Jesus Christ to whom it professes faith, the Christ who is, after all, the Savior and Lord of all churches, indeed, of all the world.”

<sup>39</sup> Volf Ibid p 158.

<sup>40</sup> Stanley Hauerwas repeatedly refers to the type of church-state relations typified by the place and collusion of the church in the Roman Empire as Constantinian Christianity. For instance see AC p 16, DFTF pp 92 – 106, CET p 104, AN p 74 – 78. In this Hauerwas follows Yoder and typifies the Constantinian heritage as an example of a hegemonic power which belied the very substance that made the church the church to begin with. Davis too is sceptical about the Constantinian heritage that the church has. His creative disaffiliation is disaffiliation from the juridical-hierarchical model of the church that arose from this Constantinian formation.

*“Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in order to profess faith to him publicly in pluriform fashion, including through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and which is open to all churches of God and to all human beings, is a church in the full sense of the word since Christ promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God. Such a congregation is a holy, catholic and apostolic church.”<sup>41</sup>*

Hence we are in a position to test Davis’s community of Discourse and Hauerwas’s community of character against the church understood as a confessing assembly carrying the marks of catholicity, holiness and apostolicity. This test will allow us to assess the extent to which Davis’s and Hauerwas’s positions present an accurate rendering of the church. Indeed, much of the terminology will already be familiar from our reading of Davis and Hauerwas. Superficially, Davis’s understanding of communication and plurality finds resonances here as will Hauerwas’s focus on the story of Christ as the normative constituent for the church. There are, however, many more points of contact and in the remainder of the chapter we shall investigate the extent other aspects of both the community of discourse and of character find connections.

Before moving on, however, one final point needs to be made. This concerns the scope of the following discussion. In the course of the discussion of the ecclesiality of Davis and Hauerwas’s communities of faith, the term *church* will be taken to mean the holy, apostolic and catholic church avoiding any particular denominational bias. That this should be the case is for three reasons, first of all, and most obviously, for

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<sup>41</sup> Volf op. cit. p 158.

ease of analysis. Secondly, our control model has built into it already some denominational sensitivities and has been constructed in such a way as to make a non-denominational, or at least interdenominational, approach viable. That is not to say that denominational issues are not important, rather it is to acknowledge the common ground between denominations and to take seriously Volf's condition of openness. We can, nevertheless, note a third, curious point. That, if it were possible, or desirable, to maintain the distinction between two types of communion then we could say that Protestantism "... makes the individuals relation to the church dependent on his relation to Christ." Whereas, on the other hand, Catholicism "... makes the individuals relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the church."<sup>42</sup> According to this distinction Davis, the Catholic, appears to be more Protestant in that he disaffiliates himself from the juridical-hierarchical church on the grounds of faith founded in mysticism. Meanwhile Hauerwas, the Protestant, appears to be more Catholic since he emphasises the church as the locus and expression on the Christians' holy stories. Such a simplistic reading, however, ignores the fact that, in real terms, a person's relationship to the church depends on their relationship to Christ while simultaneously their relationship to Christ depends on their relationship to the church. Volf maintains that these two relations are, in fact, mutually determinative.<sup>43</sup> It is, therefore, the manner in which different denominations understand these two relationships, and the weight that they give to one or the other, that mark the

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<sup>42</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher *The Christian Faith*. 1928. H.R. MacIntosh & J.S. Stewart (eds.). T&T



differences rather than any hard and fast incompatibility. Hence we have a final reason for not allowing a denominational discussion of these matters at this point.<sup>43</sup> The relationship of the individual to the church and to Christ will feature again in our discussion. In the meantime we shall proceed to explore the substance of Davis and Hauerwas's ecclesiological positions in light of our control model. To this end we shall explore their attitudes to the church as assembly and as confession, along the way we shall raise the question of sacraments, revisit the faith-belief distinction and examine the question of openness to other denominational and religious traditions.

### 6.3. Ecclesia and Creative Disaffiliation

As we saw in Chapter 3, Davis presented us with a community of discourse as the model of the community of faith that was the necessary condition for authentic political action. The importance of this community led us to draw some conclusions as to the shape of the community of faith that Davis envisages. We saw that such a community as Davis would lead us to, can have its roots in divine revelation, a necessary condition for a confessing community according to the our control model above. For Davis, the result of comprehending this revelation is a post-conventional, universalistic religious identity, both personal and social, not tied to the fixed contents and norms of any one tradition or to any permanent collective body. This identity

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Clark Edinburgh. par. 24. p 103.

<sup>43</sup> Volf op. cit. p 159.

<sup>44</sup> According to Bonhoeffer, Schleiermacher, despite the contradictory elements in his understanding of the church was aware of the mutual nature of these relationships. If he had not been he could not have anticipated the destruction of the Catholic Protestant opposition (Ibid par. 23 p 101) without the victory of one over the other. *Sanctorum Communio: a dogmatic inquiry into the sociology of the church*. 1963. Collins, London. pp 116; 224 n37 and Volf Ibid p 159.

will correspond to the present level of human social development and will facilitate authentic political action. Authentic political action comes about from a practical way of life that revolves around voluntary association in the public sphere. We saw that the impact of Davis's critical theology on the church is, in the final analysis, to reconfigure it as a community of discourse providing the transcendent foundation for sustained communication among human beings, despite their differences. In this section I will proceed to analyse this reconfigured community against our control model of a holy, catholic and apostolic church in order to assess the extent to which Davis's community of discourse fulfils any of the criteria of ecclesiality that are derivable from a standard model.

### *6.3.1. Creative Disaffiliation and The Community of Discourse*

Returning to Davis's community of discourse it is clear that, according to his use of types, the community of discourse would give priority to what he would call the mystical-pragmatic type of the church. To this extent, the church as the bearer of images, symbols, narratives, doctrines and practices should typify "... a way of life, the result of the transformation of the individual person and the community by the gift of transcendent love – a love no longer egocentric but self transcendent in a radical sense and unrestricted, even to the inclusion of enemies."<sup>45</sup> In this light, Davis suggests that the church will exhibit the working out of the implications of the experience of the beyond. The character of the community that Davis calls the church to be is exemplified by the question, "... what is the contribution of Christianity to the present social and cultural situation?"<sup>46</sup> In answer to this Davis has argued consistently that the hierarchical "... visible church is not the exclusive area of the

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<sup>45</sup> Davis WLWD p 117.

<sup>46</sup> Davis WLWD p 119.

sacred nor the community of the exclusively saved.”<sup>47</sup> Davis recognises, therefore, that the church “... to be true to itself must be (or become) a *political* society in the truest sense, that is, a community of moral discourse in which the meaning and purpose of all human endeavour is made explicit and celebrated.”<sup>48</sup> This community of discourse is a pilgrim, nomadic people, constantly uprooted, constantly on the move needing constantly to improvise to meet new and unexpected situations.<sup>49</sup> It is, quite explicitly, not a community of hierarchical-juridical structure or settled norms. As noted previously the distinguishing feature of this nomadic community is its appeal to practical reason in the interests of justice and emancipation. As such it is the model of creative disaffiliation that picks up on the insights of mystical-pragmatic Christianity.

Nevertheless, while Davis’s community of discourse marks the end of ‘Christendom’ in the hierarchical, juridical sense, it does not mark the death of the sacred. Indeed, because of the end of hierarchical Christendom, the sacred is more important than ever. In fact he says that “... Christianity is an eschatological faith.”<sup>50</sup> That Davis maintains this condition is extremely important. It places him immediately within the parameters of our control model. As primarily an eschatological faith, Christianity cannot be equated with, nor identified with, any one culture or set of traditions or norms. Davis, like Hauerwas, rejects the Constantinian heritage of the church noting that any culture that generates and sustains a hierarchy

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<sup>47</sup> Davis *A Question of Conscience*. 1967 Hodder & Staughton. London. p 185. According to Dennis McCann, Davis has argued this thesis consistently now for over thirty years. TPCT pp 49 – 74. That this is the case is beyond doubt. Consequently, that we are returning to Davis’s early work here does not mean that his ecclesiological thinking is primitive. On the contrary it is highly sophisticated. Rather it is to say emphasise the perspicacity of his original position. As we shall see this position was likely to achieve little more than vague utopian status until it could be reinforced by the critical reading of the insights of Jürgen Habermas which was only available some years later.

<sup>48</sup> McCann TPCT p 49.

<sup>49</sup> Davis QC p 187.

<sup>50</sup> Davis QC p 187.

in the face of the historical weight of secularisation is essentially pagan.<sup>51</sup> The church that emerged in Christendom engaged in this paganism and misrepresented the biblical God that it confessed. “[T]he biblical God is not a supporter of the status quo but one who breaks it up.”<sup>52</sup> Hence, maintaining an eschatological perspective on the one hand and an understanding of what he calls modern consciousness on the other, Davis reacts against the settled notion of Constantinian Christendom. This two-fold agenda provides the impetus for Davis’s concern with the social structure of the church. Thus he understands his task, as he sees it, to provide an acceptable argument for the “... acceptance of modern consciousness sufficiently strong and coherent to bring about a change in the structure of the church as a social entity.”<sup>53</sup> In chapters 2 and 3 we saw how he produced such a coherent argument. In this chapter, by testing Davis’s community of character against our control model, we can assess whether or not the new social entity is still describable as the church.

### 6.3.2. *Is the church a Community of Discourse?*

Davis has never moved very far away from the belief that the “... visible church is the fundamental sacrament in so far as it is the permanent, manifest presence of Christ in the world, the visible expression of embodiment of his union with men, the effectual sign of his saving gifts.”<sup>54</sup> This sacrament should not, however, be compromised by the demands of orthodoxy. Rather the sacrament should always be a challenge to orthodoxy to the extent that it engages in and embodies critique. Davis’s important agenda is to show how ecclesial formation and reformation cannot and

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<sup>51</sup> Davis QC p 187. Davis maintains an important distinction between secularism which is essentially hostile to notions of the sacred and secularisation which he sees as a process of differentiation wherein secular autonomy as a sphere of immediate reality is recognised against the sacred which envelops it.

<sup>52</sup> Davis QC p 187.

<sup>53</sup> Davis QC p 190.

<sup>54</sup> Davis QC p 230.

should not be separated from social transformation. Hence his practical ecclesiology is not so much a political theology as a theology of political action, realigning theory and praxis with the emphasis on praxis. In effect Davis presents a theological understanding for the appropriate location of ethical reflection in Christian social action. That is to say, abstract ethics cannot be a substitute for practical theology and practical theology must reflect an ecclesial dimension. Davis says:

“The constant appeal to practice in recent theology is just an excuse for a lack of theory. The idea of a spontaneous *orthopraxis* is a myth. Recourse is had to ethical inspiration to cover over the absence of theoretical criteria for action. But where there is a situation of oppression, a practice inspired by an ethics of change comes both too early and too late. Too early: because it comes without the work of analysis necessary to make it adequate and effectual in dealing with the oppression. Too late: because theory is thereby led to constitute itself in relation to ethical rather than political practice and is not therefore, as it should be, a theoretical discourse arising out of real emancipatory practice.”<sup>55</sup>

He concludes that the lack of social theory can be filled by a mediator between Christian faith and social action. The mediator takes the shape of a politicised ecclesiology that is capable of confronting both the church and society at large as they are presently organised. For Davis, then, the church is essential not only to Christian ethics but also to critical theology and political action. That is not to say that the church as it is in its present condition can fulfil this task. This, according to Davis, is precisely because the church as it should be, under the terms and conditions of this political ecclesiology, will allow for the correct realignment of substantive and practical reason, of theory and practice, which will allow communicative action, as

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<sup>55</sup> Davis TPS p 61.

understood by Habermas, to work. Whereas the church as it is, is bound to orthodoxy and incapable of engaging in critique and endorsing communicative action. The role of the church as mediator between Christian faith and social action is to provide the normative tradition that will make the formation of a genuine political community possible. The shape of the church will be broadly the same as that which Davis had already outlined in *A Question of Conscience*. This outline arose as a reaction against the ‘vast administrative structure’<sup>56</sup> that was the result of the church’s uncritical complicity with modernity and is typified by attempts “... to control, arrange and systematize the activity of Christians.”<sup>57</sup> Thus it is oppressive, crushing the humanity from Christians “... and frustrating their personal and social expansion.”<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, the shape of the church as it should be presents the possibility of endorsing the integrity of humanity, of the individual Christian and of the Christian faith. If the integrity of the individual Christian, and of the Christian faith is to be affirmed, as well as realising Davis’s politicised ecclesiology the church has to be re-formed. Davis acknowledges that the integrity of the individual Christian and of the Christian faith, notwithstanding the personal nature of commitment to God through Christ, depends upon the continuity of a tradition. Thus, while such commitment is not based merely upon intellectual agreement with a doctrinal position, personal commitment would be meaningless without some doctrinal content reflected in an institutionalised tradition.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> This is, incidentally what Davis means when he talks of the juridical-hierarchical structure of the church.

<sup>57</sup> Davis QC p 208.

<sup>58</sup> Davis QC p 209.

<sup>59</sup> Davis QC p 213.

“The presence of God is mediated to us through his Word, and if his definitive Word is a person, Jesus Christ, the presence of Christ is mediated to us today through the preaching of the Gospel. Without a doctrine of Jesus Christ, of his message and his work, commitment to Christ would be indistinguishable from personal fantasy or historical and philosophical invention. The Spirit within us acts in conjunction with the historical tradition of Christian belief coming to us from without. Indissolubly linked to a doctrinal content, the personal commitment of Christian faith inevitably undergoes conceptualization and formulation. And the absoluteness of that commitment is reflected in the continuity of the historical tradition of Christian belief. The Christian believer is committed to an acknowledgement of that continuity.”<sup>60</sup>

Here the christocentric nature of Davis’s community of discourse is clearly demonstrated. Moreover, we can see that the church presents the locus for the realignment of the Spirit, that is within humanity, and tradition, that comes from without. As such the church is Christocentric in character and, because of its historicity, continuous in nature. Davis’s Christocentrism, and his emphasis on traditioned continuity provide the second positive point of contact with our control model.

Nevertheless, we must return to the matter of orthodoxy because, unless we elaborate on the relationship between doctrinal content and personal commitment, it seems that Davis has compromised his earlier eschewal of orthodoxy in favour of faith. Davis maintains that the church’s continuity cannot be protected by enforcing one particular standpoint or a-historical perspective. On the contrary, continuity can only be facilitated by subordinating “... all the limited, perfectible formulations to the

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<sup>60</sup> Davis QC p 213.



preservation of Christian commitment in a succession of different cultures and to the drive toward a better understanding of Christ and his work and in the fact that no development leads to the dissolution of that commitment.”<sup>61</sup> To facilitate continuity, then, the church must become an open community of enquiry that eschews orthodoxy as an unhistorical absolute or, at the very least subordinates it to the preservation of personal commitment. This condition will be realised:

“... only by regarding Christian truth as belonging to the Christian community as a whole, as in fact being the common world of meaning that constitutes it as a community. Only by being firmly placed in the hands of the Christian community as a whole will Christian truth be fully engaged in the process of man’s becoming, fully linked to his individual and social development. And Christian truth as a common world of meaning will be preserved and transmitted by open communication. Open communication will secure that relevant questions are not suppressed, but are taken up by others and met by common effort. Through it the inadequacy of particular formulations will be revealed and counteracted by fresh thought to meet new situations and problems. Open communication can provide the remedy for errors.”<sup>62</sup>

This insight is derived from Davis’s understanding of the social nature of cognitive rationality and his impression of the effectiveness of the scientific community in establishing a process of open communication. In like manner, personal commitment of Christians’ require the freedom to ask relevant (sometimes even irrelevant) questions without predetermined definitions of the extent of relevance.<sup>63</sup> More to the

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<sup>61</sup> Davis QC p 213.

<sup>62</sup> Davis QC p 215.

<sup>63</sup> The parallels with Habermas’s principle of universalisation and principle of discourse ethics are clear. Every valid norm has to fulfil the condition that “... all affected can accept the consequences and side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone’s interest (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation.)” And the

point, however, is the implication for the re-formation of the church. By subordinating the predetermining limits of orthodoxy to 'open communication' Davis undermines the magisterial office of the church, as the final guardian and administrator of Christian truth.

With the demise of its magisterial office the church is free, in Davis's eyes, to be "... the disclosure of what is present universally in human life and history. It stands as the permanent embodiment of the explicit revelation of God's purpose for all mankind."<sup>64</sup> Such a role for the visible church is certainly compatible with our control model and is consistent with the mainstream of ecclesiological thought since Vatican II.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, Davis focuses on Christian fellowship as the significant characteristic of the manner in which this disclosure is given.

"The Christian life is the strengthening, promotion and celebration of all good and genuinely human life. It is not the creation of a special kind of existence nor the erection of a separate form of religious life nor the following of an exclusively Christian way of life. Christian fellowship is the discovery and building up of universal human fellowship. It is not the establishment of an exclusive Christian fellowship. The purpose of the Christian Liturgy is not to achieve a deeper and exclusive community experience among a special group. It is the

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principle of discourse ethics: "... only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse." For Habermas, the principle of universalisation has to do with moral questions of justice and solidarity which pertain to formal universal solution while the principle of discourse ethics has to do with ethical questions of the good life which are only addressable in the context of substantive cultures, forms of life and individual projects. Davis's theological project seems to tie them together.

<sup>64</sup> Davis QC p 221.

<sup>65</sup> McCann "The Path Marked Out by Charles Davis's Critique of Political Theology." in TPCT 49 – 74. this quote from p 55. See also Schillebeeckx *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* 1963 Sheed and Ward, London; Küng *The Church* 1968 Search Press, London.

disclosure in symbol of the meaning of and basis of the human community itself.”<sup>66</sup>

Thus, the boundary between church, world and society must remain flexible. It is only by maintaining flexible boundaries that the Christian community can realise its historical mission. As Davis understands it, this mission is to make visible universal human fellowship. The church, according to Davis, should provide for Christians a common culture whose distinctive signs cannot and will not be disfigured any more than God’s grace can be defeated. That is to say, the visible church can reveal the signs of fellowship appropriate to humanity but, in the final analysis, none of the church’s dogmatic and doctrinal structures are absolutely necessary and certainly not sufficient for the mission of creating universal human fellowship. The exclusive nature of the church must, therefore, be surrendered. That is to say, for Davis in accordance with our control model, the identity of the church is vested not in the structure, but the people. For Davis, surrendering the exclusive nature of the church takes the form of creative, political disaffiliation from the juridical hierarchical structure of the church that liberates Christians to be the people of God and not ‘Church people.’

Davis anticipates that at this point, particularly in Roman Catholic ecclesiology, there would normally be apologetic recourse to the sacraments as the final and critical characteristic of ecclesiality to justify its hierarchical structure and to belie the disaffiliate. Even here Davis is ruthless while maintaining sympathy for those who do not, or cannot, share the practical implications of his creative disaffiliation. He allows that it is important that “... people should cling to Christ according to

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<sup>66</sup> Davis QC p 222. Curiously, Davis rejects, on this basis the conventional ecumenical vision. That is to say the reunion of all ecclesial bodies in one, unified organisation since this is not an accurate reflection of the human community in its pluriform manifestations.

their present understanding... ”<sup>67</sup> and recognises that it is to this minimal extent that the juridical-hierarchical church is necessary. Davis’s own position, as we might expect, follows an inexorable logical progression. If the church itself is the fundamental sacrament,<sup>68</sup> or manifest presence of Christ on earth, then this negates the fundamental status of the seven sacraments, including the Eucharist. He says:

“The seven sacraments are actions of the church. All of them are professions of faith, hope and love on the part of the Christian community. Made up of words and actions, the sacraments are symbols in which the community proclaims its faith, unfolds its hope and declares its love – a love that includes repentance. Looking at the sacraments we can see what is the mind of the church in regard to Christ and gauge the manner of its commitment to him. In the setting of this Christian faith and commitment, six of the sacraments are actions of the community in relation to particular members. The Eucharist, as the chief sacrament, is the general gathering together of Christians for a common celebration of the total mystery of Christ.”<sup>69</sup>

In short, the attitude to sacraments within the church should reflect the truth of the Christian faith that lies in its mystical–pragmatic dimensions and not present prior limits to the extent of possible structural change. That is to say, if Davis’s post-orthodoxy signals the end of the ambiguous relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, it does so on the basis of exposing the limited and limiting perspective of a position that appeals to orthodoxy. Equally, it shows that there is no future in

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<sup>67</sup> Davis QC p 230.

<sup>68</sup> See note 52 above.

<sup>69</sup> Davis QC p 231. Davis’s reference to seven sacraments reflects his Roman catholic background. Latterly, he maintains that the chief sacraments to be the Eucharist and baptism. The other five ordination, reconciliation, viaticum, marriage and confirmation are significant in terms of their ritual practice within the community rather than their sacramental status. In conversation with Prof. Davis. Edinburgh September 1997.

orthopraxy if that means absolutising the church's current structures including even the sacraments.

So far we have seen that Davis's community of discourse certainly corresponds extensively with our control model. The correspondence occurs in three areas. First of all, Davis recognises the significance of assembly as a criterion of ecclesiality. This is evident to the extent that Davis focuses on Christian fellowship as the significant characteristic of the manner in which this disclosure of that which is present universally in human life is given. As an assembling community, then, the church presents, in a proximate and contingent manner, God's purpose for humanity. In the second place, Davis's community of discourse is a confessing community. The evidence for this, too, is clear. The presence of God, says Davis, is mediated to us through his Word and if his definitive Word is a person, Jesus Christ, the presence of Christ is mediated to us today through the preaching of the Gospel. Without a doctrine of Jesus Christ, of his message and his work, commitment to Christ would be indistinguishable from personal fantasy or historical and philosophical invention. Thirdly, for Davis and according to our control model, the confessing assembly must also be proleptic and anamnestic. First of all, in this regard Davis is explicit in his assertion that Christianity is an eschatological faith and thus anticipatory. Secondly, he is explicit in his concern and acknowledgement of the continuity of Christian belief, and thus recognises the significance of remembering. Insofar as Davis maintains these conditions, he is placed immediately within the parameters of our control

model. Finally, and by no means least, for Davis, in accordance with our control model, the identity of the church is vested not in the structure, but the people. Given this level of agreement we can safely conclude that Davis's community of discourse meets the conditions of ecclesiality laid down in our control model and hence that the church can be seen as a community of discourse.

### *6.3.3 The Church is a Community of Discourse*

We can now draw a number of practical conclusions about the church understood as a community of discourse as signalled by Davis. First of all, while returning to one of Davis's earlier works for his understanding of a political ecclesiology that is capable of confronting the political demands of modernity, it should be noted that Davis's work must be seen as a corpus which develops, expanding on themes which could not always be dealt with at the time. For example, the model of the church outlined by Davis in *A Question of Conscience* promises nothing more than to dissolve under the weight of utopianism. That is, until he invokes critically the work of Habermas to give substance to his own notion of a community of discourse. This provides the mechanism for establishing the church as the formal norm for judging the validity of any kind of political action and any kind of social organisation or praxis. In so doing, Davis allows the church to comprehend the thrust towards, and the relevance of, emancipation wherever it is to be found. Indeed, it is the ultimate meaning of the church to realise the real possibility of liberation, implicit in Habermas's communicative action, in a tradition institutionalised as a community of faith rather than a community of feudal

orthodoxy.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the impetus of Davis's ecclesiology is towards reformation through the transformative principle of faith. Bearing in mind Davis's critique of Marxism and his claim that "[T]radition is the author of such transformation, since it is the presence of the Spirit in human history..."<sup>71</sup> we can characterise his ecclesiology with the phrase *semper reformanda*!

Secondly, we can conclude that the un-reformed church, in Davis's terms, is patently ignoring its mission, in response to the gospel, to recognise and deliver justice in the world. That is to say, that insofar as the church does not heed the significance of Davis's call to a new integrity in its ministry and mission, it remains un-reformed because it cannot allow the transformative principle of faith to work. If it is the case that, in common with Habermas, the church seeks a praxis of societal transformation, then it must envision and empower a normative tradition. That tradition must answer those critics who cast it in the role of the oppressor. The way to avoid this role is to be actively engaged in a quest for "... plenitude and totality, [which] as a pursuit of transcendent truth and value may surely be counted among the sources of emancipatory experience, and as such, self-criticism against its own imperfect and corrupt manifestations is built into it."<sup>72</sup> This vision depends, of course, on understanding the critique of orthodoxy to be inherent to the dynamism of faith itself, which reflects the insight of the mystical-pragmatic model of Christianity. Understood thus, the church is an ally in the political fight against oppression and not an enemy siding with oppressors because a community of faith need not be inimical to emancipation.

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<sup>70</sup> McCann TPCT p 72.

<sup>71</sup> Davis TPS p 103.

<sup>72</sup> Davis TPS p 131.



Thirdly, Davis's creative disaffiliation from the hierarchical church has to be seen as a positive step towards reformation and transformation rather than a negative withdrawal to the margins. If the church is a definable cultural tradition in the West then, it seems that reformers and transformers have often adopted just such a position, but in historical continuity with the tradition. What marks them out is their vision of the way the church might operate more effectively. What distinguishes Davis's position is the promise of a political ecclesiology that can envision a future towards which its social praxis can be orientated. That promise generates a new articulation beyond particularism and orthodoxy, embracing a new religious identity that is also faithful to the religious identity of the past:

"Participation in communication processes for the formation of norms and values *is a basis* for a universalised ego-structure transcending the particularism of enclosed groups. But such a universalistic ego-structure does not in itself imply the unconditional worth of the individual. Are we then simply to relinquish the Christian stress upon the individual self? After all, the doctrine of an individual self, distinct from God, but constituted in relationship to him, is not shared by the nontheistic religious traditions."<sup>73</sup>

Thus, Davis is attacking the 'bland catholicity' of uncritical ecumenism, or the naïve relativism or juridical-hierarchical ecclesiality, by introducing a community of discourse that has primacy over the contents and norms of any one tradition or any permanent collective body. Its primacy comes from the fact that it can and does forge links with a broader religious tradition and thus relativises its own content and norms. Davis, in the end, presents an agenda for a political ecclesiology that reflects

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<sup>73</sup> Davis TPS p 174.

and articulates a universal church that does not yet exist.<sup>74</sup> The universal church that does not yet exist can, however, be anticipated and worked towards under already existing conditions. As Davis says "...active participation in a universality to be realised in the future. Present working for a yet-to-be-realised universality can already unite people of different positions."<sup>75</sup> This calls for a creative tension to be developed between the church as it is and those like Davis who see the church as it should be.

Finally, since Davis has undermined 'bland catholicity' we must examine his own understanding of a more appropriate catholicity. For Davis, the fact that he sees the church as a community of discourse, and as the fundamental sacrament, making visible the manifest presence of Christ in the world has a knock on effect whereby the meaning of the church is to render visible and explicit universal human fellowship. Since the Christian world of meaning, which is the visible church, coincides with the common human world of meaning, which is constitutive of the human community, Davis can suggest a universality common to both. It is in this way that the church is universal. The centre is firmly and christocentrically located but the boundaries are blurred. "The center is Christ, visibly present through those who are explicitly committed to him through faith."<sup>76</sup> Thus Christ is made universally present in the world. The mission of Christians, ironically, is not to embody the visible church but the universal community of humanity in anticipation of "the final Kingdom."<sup>77</sup> Davis

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<sup>74</sup> The similarity between this notion of the universal church, presupposed in every moment that the church attempts to embrace authentic political action, and Habermas's ideal speech situation is obvious. This ideal speech situation, though not routinely at hand, does imply that communicative action, although always occurring in an historical context, depends also on an *a*-historical dynamic. Communicative action, or action orientated towards understanding and consensus is, therefore, to be contrasted strongly with strategic action or action orientated towards success.

<sup>75</sup> Davis TPS p 173.

<sup>76</sup> Davis QC p 222.

<sup>77</sup> Davis QC p 226.

says that the history of salvation is not a main-line history, nor is it even a parallel to main-line history. On the contrary, it is a subversion of history brought about through faith and vision:

“The apocalyptic lightning flashes group together people and events unnoticed by and consequently non-existent for the mighty of this world. That all the discrete configurations of meaning will somehow all fit together in the end is a hope for the eschaton not to be sought as realised in any historical institution.”<sup>78</sup>

Two points are clear from this. First of all, the church described by Davis is clearly Christocentric, confessional and proleptic. As such it fulfils the criteria laid down in our control model. Secondly Davis presents an understanding of the church as an association of “...unstable and transitory groups and movements. These come and go.”<sup>79</sup> For Davis, therefore, the People of God, the redeemed community of the Spirit, are a scattered people, a diaspora.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, any attempt to stabilise it in a permanent collective body is to assert that freedom “...consists in accepting a teaching and a history which are not and never have been ours.”<sup>81</sup> Hence, we can conclude with Davis that it is not only possible but desirable for the church to be understood as a community of discourse. This community of discourse, however, clearly tends to catholicity and unity over apostolicity and holiness.

#### 6.4. Creative Disaffiliation and Ecclesia

We turn now to examine Hauerwas’s community of character in light of our control model. Again I will analyse this reconfigured community against our control

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<sup>78</sup> Davis “Is The church an Idol?” *Commonweal*. 1 February 1980. Pp 45 – 48, p 48

<sup>79</sup> Davis Ibid p 48.

<sup>80</sup> Davis Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Davis Ibid.

model of a holy, catholic and apostolic church in order to assess the extent to which Hauerwas's community of character fulfils any of the criteria of ecclesiality that are derivable from a standard model. At the outset we must point out that it is not always clear that the church that Hauerwas describes either exists or even might come to be in the future. It might be described as "... a fantasy community which fails to reflect the ways in which the members of the church are positioned within civil society."<sup>82</sup> This reflects a curious and ambivalent relationship between Hauerwas's descriptive representation of the actual church and his prescriptive proposal for the way the church might be.<sup>83</sup> Hauerwas's own ambivalence is apparent in his self-confessed churchmanship as a Methodist, high-church Mennonite.<sup>84</sup> It is the purpose of this section to examine this curious relationship and put his claims to the test against our control model of church. We shall do this by, reflecting on the community of character and examining the extent to which Hauerwas is successful in showing the presence of the prescriptive church within the description of the empirical church.

#### *6.4.1. Creative Disaffiliation and the Community of Character*

Though difficult to see at times, the conclusion of Hauerwas's counter-cultural position is not one of isolationism. Rather it is the starting point for a significant contribution to the wider social world.<sup>85</sup> As David Fergusson says, "Hauerwas's claim is simply that by living genuinely as a distinctive Christian community the church may have more impact on its surrounding society than by advocating consensus

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<sup>82</sup> Davis Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> We have already noted a similar tension in Davis's critical theology.

<sup>84</sup> Hauerwas COC p 6. Also Fergusson op. cit. p 243.

<sup>85</sup> See David Fergusson "Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 50 no2 1997 pp 242 – 249. Fergusson cites Arne Rasmusson as a powerful ally in this understanding of Hauerwas's position. I would concur to the extent that there is nowhere for Hauerwas to withdraw to and appreciate his effort to turn an apparent vice into a virtue.

solutions to the problems we face.”<sup>86</sup> This is viable, however, only to the extent that the church maintains its independence from public language and accountability. By so doing the church provides “... the space and time necessary for developing skills of interpretation and discrimination sufficient to help us recognize the possibilities and limits of our society.”<sup>87</sup> Thus described, the church embodies the art of the weak. As a result the church must occupy alien or foreign ground. As such it must use the language resources and tools that are at hand, but not controlled or determined by the church. The church cannot withdraw from the public sphere because there is no place of its own to retreat to.<sup>88</sup> The political action that Hauerwas envisions for the church is, therefore, the tactic of guerrilla warfare. In other words Hauerwas is, like Davis, advocating a creative disaffiliation. Where Davis’s disaffiliation brought him out of the juridical-hierarchical church and into the cultural desert to be navigated by a community of discourse, Hauerwas’s disaffiliation takes him from the cultural desert and into the church, understood as a community of character.

#### 6.4.2. *Is The Church a Community of Character?*

As we have noted above, Hauerwas’s ethics are, first and foremost, ecclesial ethics. That is to say, he presents the church as that community of moral discourse which embodies and witnesses to a particularly truthful kind of politics thus rendering a truthful people in service to the kingdom of God. For the church to be the church in Hauerwas’s eyes, then, certain conditions must be present. The church’s identity is shaped by these prevailing conditions; namely, the sovereignty of God, the imitation of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit. That is not to say that the

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<sup>86</sup> Fergusson Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Hauerwas COC p 74.

<sup>88</sup> See Hauerwas AC pp 16 & 163 n. 3. See also CET and RA.

church's activities are not important. As we have seen Hauerwas assert particular activities render a particular people. These activities are, however, secondary to, and derived from, the prevailing conditions. Consequently, the church should be understood not as a collection of activities but as a people with a particular identity.

First of all, for Hauerwas, the church is a confession of the sovereignty of God. That is to say, Hauerwas understands Christians to have been "...called to form communities that manifest the trust and the love possible between people when they recognise the sovereignty of God over all life."<sup>89</sup> Recognition of this sovereignty requires that the church makes manifest the character of God. That means participation in the divine character: you must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.<sup>90</sup> A quote from Yoder, which could just as easily have issued from Hauerwas's pen serves to illustrate this point: "The Christian loves his or her enemies because God does, and God commands his followers to do so: that is the only reason, and that is enough."<sup>91</sup> For Hauerwas, God's sovereignty depends upon and reflects the kingdom. The practical result of this is that the activities of the church, when they reflect the values of the peaceable kingdom, are the activities that affirm God's sovereignty. As we have noted, however, the church is not, for Hauerwas, primarily a collection of activities but an embodiment of a certain character. This perspective connects significantly with our control model when we consider that the embodiment of the character Hauerwas talks about is, in effect, a life of confessing. As such, the

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<sup>89</sup> Hauerwas *Suffering Presence* p 147.

<sup>90</sup> Rasmussen *The Church as Polis* p 303. "Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God ... built on the conviction that peace is ontologically more basic than violence, because that is the way that God rules the creation." Again, insofar as Hauerwas argues for nonviolence, this reflects the be-as relationship.

<sup>91</sup> Yoder *Living the Disarmed Life: A Study Guide for churches on the Nuclear Arms Race*. 1981 Washington DC. p 42. Sam Wells points out that Hauerwas and Yoder's arguments are so close that they can be followed interchangeably. Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny*. p 90.

church envisaged by Hauerwas is both confessional and, being confessional, requires and fosters commitment.

Reflecting that commitment, we have seen Hauerwas suggest that the church has to be the most political of all institutions because of its commitment to the truth. The polity of the church, is the polity of discipleship carried out in anticipation of the peaceable kingdom of God. The distinguishing feature of the politics of the church's politics, therefore, is nonviolence. To understand this properly we must understand that, in performing the politics of discipleship, the church is not concerned with avoiding conflict either internally or externally. Rather it is concerned with creating the conditions necessary for the right kind of conflict and confrontation, which is done through its institutions and associations. The politics of discipleship is, therefore, the politics of developing "...processes and institutions that make possible confrontation and resolution of differences so that violence can be avoided."<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas concludes that this form of peacemaking, this process "... is not simply one activity among many but the very form of the church."<sup>93</sup> In relation to those outside the church, the church must be as truthful with them as it is with itself. The church maintains truthfulness by relating the peace of the kingdom to the Christian understanding of forgiveness exemplified by the embodiment of the kingdom in Christ.<sup>94</sup> Thus, to be the church is to respond to the sovereignty of God by embodying the character of God. To make manifest the character of God, however, is to imitate the fully human and fully divine Christ.

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<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas *Peacemaking* pp 95 – 96.

<sup>93</sup> Hauerwas *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> See Hauerwas *The Peaceable Kingdom, and Why Truthfulness Requires Forgiveness: A Commencement Address For the Graduates of a College of The Church of the Second Chance*. DFTF pp 80 – 88.



For Hauerwas, the imitation of Christ is a reflection of his understanding that Christ is the foundational principle for Christian ethics and consequently the church, since the church is not to have but be a social ethic. Wells points out that:

“For the situation into which Jesus came, and the forces with which he came into contact, were ones of abiding historical and political relevance: then as now, the kingdom of God confronted racism, militarism, nationalism, the corruption of justice, mob spirit and action, religious bigotry and the pressure of government. Do these forces constitute the true nature of history? Or did Jesus expose, address and redeem them and thus define history differently? Yoder and Hauerwas insist that the latter is the case.”<sup>95</sup>

Given this understanding, Hauerwas can maintain that the imitation of Christ gives substance to the church’s witness to God’s sovereignty and the embodiment of the kingdom for two reasons. First of all, imitating Christ affirms the continuity of God’s revelation in the world from the Old Testament, through Christ and into the church. Secondly, imitating Christ provides a basis for Christian ethics that outweighs alternative foundations for Christian ethics.<sup>96</sup> I have dealt with much of the material covering the first point of this discussion in Chapter 5. It is the second point that I wish to consider here before drawing some conclusions about the church understood as a community of character.

A community that imitates Christ, maintains Hauerwas, is a community that has made the journey from community to church by embodying the narrative of Jesus in its practices and, in so doing, seeks to imitate the character of God. This is, in turn,

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<sup>95</sup> Wells op.cit p 91.

<sup>96</sup> For an extremely useful history of Christian social ethics of the kind that Hauerwas reacts against see Wells Ibid pp 3 – 12.

a profession of the belief that God participated in human nature insofar as he is involved in creating a people who refuse to meet the world on its own terms. The ability to sustain this position of disaffiliation comes as we have noted, from the appropriate human response to God's revelation, which is the imitation of Christ. For Hauerwas the best image of Christ for imitation comes from the gospel story of the temptation.<sup>97</sup> In this story, Christ resists the temptation to become a great prophet, a king or high priest. The resistance represents, Christ's capitulation with God's will for his life and his death. The point that Hauerwas makes here is that Christ appears to be called to responsible action in this story, feeding the hungry and the poor, dominion that will bring peace to nations, and yet he chose the course of humility and love and went to the cross. The reason for this apparently bizarre choice arises because the 'responsible action', to which he was called was defined and determined by different parameters than those which gave Christ's life meaning. For Hauerwas, Christ's response gives shape to a Christian ethic of non-violence and peacefulness, supported by truthfulness. This, in turn, is the shape of the church in the world in terms of an alien nation. This represents a creative disaffiliation from the powers of the world and from Christian ethics that capitulate with them. We shall return to this theme later. In the meantime we should note that as Hauerwas stresses the imitation of Christ he signals another point of contact with our control model. The 'path of *imitatio*' means that the church envisaged by Hauerwas represents a communion of individuals who, in confessing Christ, are confessing to his work in revealing God's peaceable kingdom. By so doing, the Christian commits him or herself to that kingdom. Thus, Hauerwas understands the church to be confessional and lays particular emphasis on the nature of the commitment that the confession requires.

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<sup>97</sup> Hauerwas PK p 76.

This conception of the church presents serious implications for the life and worship of local churches. By calling for Christians to rediscover their alien status Hauerwas, of course, invites a series of questions: 'Where is the church you ... talk about?' 'Where did it ever exist in Christian history?' 'Where does it exist today?' 'How can it exist today?'<sup>98</sup> Given Hauerwas's theological commitments, he cannot respond to such questions simply by distinguishing between the visible and invisible church. Neither can he talk about what the church ought to be. If Hauerwas's ecclesial ethic is to be at all viable the local church as it is has to be the starting point.<sup>99</sup> For the purposes of analysis and ease of illustration, we can cast the question in terms of another question: is the church to be understood as the people of God or the body of Christ?<sup>100</sup> Hauerwas calls for the church not to be merely a community, like any other that might shape individuals, but to be a body constituted by "... disciplines that create the capacity to resist the disciplines of the body associated with the modern nation state. ... For the church to *be* a social ethic rather than to *have* a social ethic, means that the church is a body polity."<sup>101</sup> As such, Hauerwas falls on the side of the church as the body of Christ as distinct from the idea of the people of God, and therefore on the side of hierarchy and even authoritarianism over against an open democratic understanding of the church.<sup>102</sup> As we observed earlier, this is not necessarily a problem for Hauerwas since his understanding of practice requires that the participant

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<sup>98</sup> Hauerwas *In Defense of Cultural Christianity: Reflections on Going to Church*. p 13.

<sup>99</sup> Hauerwas *Ibid*.

<sup>100</sup> Hauerwas *What Could it Mean for The Church to be Christ's Body? A Question Without Clear Answers*. Unpublished Conference paper subsequently published as part of the collection by Hauerwas: *In Good Company: the Church as Polis* 1995. University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana.

<sup>101</sup> Hauerwas *Ibid*.

<sup>102</sup> See George Lindbeck *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology* 1970. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. This is Lindbeck's account of Vatican II and one which, through being a student with Lindbeck, greatly influenced Hauerwas.

learn from masters and this, in turn, presupposes the exercise of authority. Nevertheless, we still have to ask what the shape of Christ's Body will be. Echoing John Milbank, Hauerwas argues that the church should not be considered in a spatial sense, in terms of an exemplar or location to which we might arrive.<sup>103</sup> This implies an understanding of the church restricted in time when in fact the church represents a new time.<sup>104</sup> To explain this contention Hauerwas refers to the church's practice of celebrating the sacraments.<sup>105</sup> Rasmussen notes that Hauerwas's sacramental theology is sketchy and thus creates some problems.<sup>106</sup> We are not, however, concerned here with specifics of liturgical rites. Rather we can reiterate an earlier point and appreciate Hauerwas's reading of Milbank when he says that it is in the practice of the Eucharist that the church is truly a body. Hence, the church is neither programme nor even a real society but an enactment or performance. The church, therefore, is to be found on the "... site of the Eucharist, which is not a site; since it suspends presence in favour of memory and expectation."<sup>107</sup> This understanding of time makes sense of both the church as prolepsis and of the localised congregation. It is in this practice that the local church is connected to all other churches that also celebrate the Eucharist as participation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As such, the church for Hauerwas is both a *communio sanctorum* and a *communio fidelium*, but more the body of Christ than the people of God, both local and universal.

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<sup>103</sup> John Milbank "Enclaves, or Where is The Church?" *New Blackfriars*. 73, 861 (June 1992) pp 341 – 342.

<sup>104</sup> See Sam Wells *How The Church Performs Jesus's Story: Improvising on The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*. 1995 PhD Thesis. University of Durham. See also Hauerwas *What Could it Mean for The Church to be Christ's Body?* p 15.

<sup>105</sup> Hauerwas *Faith in the Republic* p 524, CET p 118 – 121.

<sup>106</sup> Rasmussen *church as Polis*. p 192.

<sup>107</sup> Milbank *Enclaves, or Where is The Church?* cited by Hauerwas *What Could it Mean for The Church to be Christ's Body?* p 16.

Although christocentric Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics are, however, not at all as clear as we might expect about Christology.

"It is not clear from Hauerwas's writing whether Jesus was the last of the prophets ... or whether he was the first of the saints. ... The latter model is one concerned primarily with revelation - Jesus is seen revealing how his followers are to live. The former model is more concerned with redemption as a once-for-all event. Has redemption definitively taken place in the resurrection and ascension, or is it still taking place in the church?"<sup>108</sup>

That we can ask these questions at all betrays Hauerwas's own diverse ecclesiological background and, most clearly, his openness to other Christian denominations. We have already noted various Mennonite and Roman Catholic influences on Hauerwas but here we can note further the practical implication of this openness. Wells suggests that we can represent this question by asking of Hauerwas whether redemption is a story to be remembered by the community or a drama to be performed?<sup>109</sup> This question relates to how the church is to embody the kingdom, how to live the politics of discipleship. As such, Wells suggests, it raises denominational debates. The former can be said, roughly, to typify the Reformed notion of the Eucharist while the latter represents, roughly, the Roman Catholic position.<sup>110</sup> Inevitably, Hauerwas has to say that for the church to be the church it must have both, performance and remembrance. To this extent, added to his concern with the continuity of tradition Hauerwas presents a community that is anamnestic as well as proleptic.

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<sup>108</sup> Wells *Transforming Fate to Destiny*. p 97.

<sup>109</sup> Wells *Ibid* p 98.

<sup>110</sup> On this point see Schillebeeckx *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. 1963. Sheed and Ward, London. pp 184 - 195.

So far we have seen that Hauerwas's community of character clearly corresponds extensively with our control model. The correspondence occurs at three points. First of all, the community of character is an assembly. Hauerwas understands the church primarily as a people with a particular identity not a collection of activities. Secondly, it is confessional in that we have seen Hauerwas's Christocentric orientation appear repeatedly. In this case it is the focus of the church's confession in the sovereign God. Moreover, this Christocentrism manifests itself in the Hauerwas's call for the church to imitate Christ, marking it out as holy and apostolic. Thirdly, given Hauerwas's focus on the historicity of the Christian tradition and its continuity as well as his orientation towards the peaceable kingdom, it is clearly anamnestic and proleptic. Given this level of agreement we can safely conclude that the community of character meets the conditions of ecclesiality laid out in our control model and hence that the church can be seen as a community of character.

#### 6.4.3. *The Church is a Community of Character*

We can now draw a number of conclusions about the church as a community of character. First of all, that Hauerwas's church is confessional is without doubt. The church as a counter cultural enclave, in confessing truthfully the peaceable kingdom, cannot realise justice or peace through force or coercion. Neither can the church allow injustice to carry on unresolved, because the peaceable kingdom is a kingdom of justice that is concerned with the well being of the neighbour.<sup>111</sup> This disposition, Hauerwas claims, requires the Christian to become the "...most political of all animals."<sup>112</sup> Consequently the church will be the most political of all institutions, since the practice of peaceableness requires policies, practices and institutions to make

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<sup>111</sup> Hauerwas PK p 146.

<sup>112</sup> Hauerwas CET p 96.

possible non-violent confrontation and resolution of conflict which marks the world's politics. In short, Christians are politically active, in and in light of the politics of the kingdom, wherein and whereby they are understood to be "... a community which tries to develop the resources to stand within the moral witnessing to the peaceable kingdom and thus rightly understanding the world."<sup>113</sup> And this is because "[p]olitics as the art of the maintenance of a good society is the art that is at the heart of being a Christian."<sup>114</sup>

Secondly, the witness that Hauerwas describes is only possible to the extent that it is substantiated by the imitation of Christ. The imitation of Christ forms for Hauerwas the basis for reinterpreting apostolicity in terms of his focus on the narrative of Christ and the early church, and aligning holiness with the tradition of virtue and formation inherent in the church as a community of faith. As we have discussed, this focus has opened the way for attacks on Hauerwas from the likes of James Gustafson, to the effect that Hauerwas is a sectarian. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that the path of imitation does make it possible for Hauerwas to take the church as it is as his starting point for authentic politics while subordinating it to the church as it should be. The substance of the vision of the way the church should be comes from Hauerwas's understanding of the peaceable kingdom. We should note here another possible criticism of Hauerwas that relates to his christocentrism and the idea of imitating Christ. That is to say that he has been accused of Pelagianism to

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<sup>113</sup> Hauerwas PK p 102.

<sup>114</sup> Hauerwas TT p 143.



the effect that rather than concentrating on grace and justification Hauerwas concentrates on sanctification.<sup>115</sup> It is undeniable that Hauerwas focuses on sanctification, or holiness. His defence to this (should it need one) would be that making categories like justification and sanctification primary is theologically questionable. Moreover, Hauerwas understands the church as a social, eschatological and practical community that is ill served by traditional radical reformation ideas of sanctification and justification.<sup>116</sup> They are better understood as rules for the right living of the Christian story. “ ‘Sanctification’ is but a way of reminding us of the kind of journey we must undertake if we are to make the story of Jesus our story. ‘Justification’ is but a reminder of the character of that story – namely what God has done for us by providing us with a path to follow.”<sup>117</sup> Equally, the new life that Christians are called to is a gift that is mediated through the adoption into the Christian holy story such that we can retrospectively acknowledge and discover “...that our lives have been made more than we could acknowledge at any one time...” through God’s forgiveness.<sup>118</sup> Thus Hauerwas subordinates theological orthodoxy to embodying the Christian holy story.

Thirdly, for Hauerwas, the church is an eschatological communion. All of the virtue and character and marks of the church are to be properly understood only in

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<sup>115</sup> Thomas Ogletree “Character and Narrative: Stanley Hauerwas’s *Studies of the Christian Life*” *Religious Studies Review*. 6/1/ (Jan. 1980) pp24 – 30 and Rasmussen *The Church as Polis*. pp199 - 201

<sup>116</sup> Hauerwas COC p 240, 245. AC p 37.

<sup>117</sup> Hauerwas PK p 94. This is a revision of his earlier comments in the first edition of CCL.

light of the new *telos* promised by the Kingdom of God to which the church is a witness. That is to say that Hauerwas recognises the eschatological dimension of the Kingdom to which the church is required to be faithful. Thus "...we are an eschatological people who base our lives on the knowledge that God has redeemed his creation through the work of Jesus Christ. Thus we are called to live out of control in the sense that we must assume God will use our faithfulness to make his kingdom a reality."<sup>119</sup> The overriding virtue, for Hauerwas arises at this point in that this new *telos* means that the church and individual Christians are to live "out of control."<sup>120</sup> By this he means that we are no longer called to be effective political agents so much as we are called to be faithful to the kingdom and embody authentic politics. We are, he says, liberated from concerning ourselves with making history come out right. Instead we are called to the responsibility of witnessing to the kingdom, through an imitation of Christ. Thus it is possible to see the church as a community of character.

Finally, we have noted that Hauerwas, like Davis, is not impressed by 'bland' catholicity of uncritical ecumenism or naïve relativism. Rather, through a counter cultural structure, confessing Christ and witnessing to the Kingdom of God, the church:

"... finds in Jesus not simply a restorer of lost creation known separately from Jesus himself, but rather in Jesus

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<sup>118</sup> Hauerwas 'On Developing Hopeful Virtues' p 114.

<sup>119</sup> Hauerwas PK p 105.

<sup>120</sup> Hauerwas PK p 105.

the church discovers the very nature of the created order. In short, in Christ we know that creation was not an act in and for itself, but an act carried out for a purpose... The original creation is aimed at a new creation, the creation of a community of all flesh that glorifies God.”<sup>121</sup>

Hence, Hauerwas envisages a church that is characteristically proleptic and catholic. The church understood as a community of character is participating in the ongoing work of creation by God through Christ. The politics of the church is the politics of the kingdom and as such is the politics of discipleship. Hence the mission of Christians for Hauerwas is to embody the kingdom in the visible church, but only insofar as this is an accurate, albeit incomplete, reflection of the yet to be realised kingdom. The church, therefore, embodies and presents a subversion of the life and history of the world. That Hauerwas is, like Davis, a creative disaffiliate makes sense of Fergusson’s insight, and Hauerwas’s own contention, that he is not advocating isolationism but providing a coherent starting point for a significant Christian contribution to the politics of the wider world.<sup>122</sup> Hence we can conclude that it is possible and even desirable for the church to be understood as a community of character. Nevertheless, we must concede that Hauerwas community of character does tend to the credal mark of holiness and apostolicity above catholicity and unity.

To conclude this section we shall briefly summarise our findings. Thus far we have examined the extent to which Davis’s community of discourse and Hauerwas’s community of virtue represented the church and related to a control model of the empirical church. Measuring the communities of discourse and character against our

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<sup>121</sup> Hauerwas *Chief Ends* p 207.

<sup>122</sup> Hauerwas DFTF p 18. Fergusson op. cit.

control model we have concluded that they both reflect a confessing assembly, that displays the properties of prolepsis and anamnesis. It is possible and even desirable to understand the church as both a community of discourse and a community of character. The most significant difference lies in the fact that while the community of discourse tends to emphasise the credal marks of catholicity and unity above holiness and apostolicity, the community of character tends to emphasise holiness and apostolicity above catholicity and unity. Bearing this in mind, we are now in a position to suggest that we should start to look at Davis and Hauerwas as not, necessarily, contradictory or irreconcilable. We would contend, therefore, that Davis and Hauerwas might be better understood in the first instance as complementary. That is to say, as conversation partners whose positions, rather than issuing in a deadlock, describe the boundaries of an ongoing theological conversation and a more complete and integrated picture of the church.

## 6.5 Redeeming Ecclesia

In the final section of this chapter, then, it is our intention to examine the consequences of this conversation between Davis and Hauerwas. We shall do this by, first of all noting the common ground shared between the two as creative disaffiliates. Secondly, we shall extend the analogy and look more closely at the conditions under which Davis and Hauerwas might continue the conversation.

### *6.5.1. The Common Ground of Creative Disaffiliation*

At this point we shall bring Davis and Hauerwas together and list the common themes and concerns running through their work. First of all we shall note that both Davis and Hauerwas concern themselves with the church as either the people of God

or the body of Christ. We have seen that while Davis is more comfortable with an understanding of the people of God, Hauerwas tends more to an understanding of the body of Christ. On the one hand, Davis's community of discourse is, he asserts, a pilgrim, nomadic people, constantly uprooted, constantly on the move needing constantly to improvise to meet new and unexpected situations. On the other hand, Hauerwas maintains that the Body of Christ is a collection of resident aliens, witnessing to the peaceable kingdom. Secondly, the character of the communities described share a Christocentric vision. Thirdly, both Davis and Hauerwas are sensitive to the sacramental role of the church as mediating Christ's presence. Davis holds the church to be the fundamental sacrament of Christ's presence wherein ritual practice is a derivative, secondary activity. Hauerwas, too, maintains that the ritual practices of the church are significant only to the extent that they contribute to substantiating the character of the community of faith and hence mediating Christ's presence. Fourth, both Davis and Hauerwas share a concern with the boundaries between the community of faith and the world. For Davis the mythical-visionary model espoused by Hauerwas created too solid a boundary whereas, Hauerwas sees the mystical-pragmatic model favoured by Davis as presenting too weak and fluid a boundary. Fifth, Davis and Hauerwas both share a concern with the continuity of the community of discourse that they each envisage. Sixth, both Davis and Hauerwas are concerned with the significance of faith over belief, and any impetus to understand

Christianity as belief, and therefore orthodoxy, rather than faith.<sup>123</sup> Seventh, Davis and Hauerwas, in the final analysis are both concerned with developing a practical rationale to justify creative disaffiliation, Davis from the mythical-visionary, juridical and hierarchical church and Hauerwas from the excess of modern, liberal polity.

To this end, Davis and Hauerwas both agree that political theology, though useful has been ultimately unsuccessful. It has been useful and correct to the extent that they assert the truth or truthfulness of Christian conviction cannot be separated from its political implications. Political theology is, however, misguided for two reasons, both of which derive from the assumption that politics is not mostly a question of social change. First of all, the political questions of liberation, freedom from violence and oppression and so on, must be applied to the church. For Hauerwas, as we have seen, the rigour of this application must at least match, or out-do, the rigour of application to society. Thus, since Hauerwas sees the crucial question for the church is "... what kind of community it needs to be faithful to the narrative central to Christian convictions..."<sup>124</sup> he advocates and attempts to sustain creative disaffiliation from modern, liberal polity and embraces a mythical-visionary ecclesiology. Secondly, Davis suggests a similar question insofar as the kind of community the church needs to be to be faithful to the narrative central to Christian convictions requires the politicising of the church. The political issue, therefore, is to rediscover the impact of the mystical-pragmatic strand of Christianity on the tradition of moral discourse that is framed by the church and thus enables the church to render

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<sup>123</sup> Hauerwas *In Defense* p1 – 3. "In liberal cultures it is almost impossible to resist the temptation to think of Christianity as a set of beliefs." This quote could, just as easily, have issued from Davis's pen as from Hauerwas.

<sup>124</sup> Hauerwas COC p 2.

visible the possibility of universal human fellowship. Davis, therefore, advocates creative disaffiliation from the mythical-visionary model of the church, in light of critical theology and the new religious identity that can realise authentic political action in this regard.

### 6.5.2 *Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?*

The question might now be posed, *Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?* As we noted in Chapter 3, Davis rightly suggests that the mystical-pragmatic type of ecclesiology that he endorses can really only have its incarnation alongside and in dialogue with the mythical-visionary type and as such has, historically, acted as a corrective to the ontological pretensions of mythical Christianity. We suggested that where Davis's community of discourse represents a feasible expression of the mystical-pragmatic model, Hauerwas's community of character represented a challenging and vital expression of the mythical-visionary model. By taking together the types of political action intrinsic to these models we can see that the complementarity of the types is increased. In mystical pragmatic Christianity, there is a productive tension between moral action in this world and withdrawal from action to passive contemplation. This relationship is coupled with an idea of the church that relates voluntary association in the public sphere to an invisible spiritual communion.<sup>125</sup> In the mythical-visionary model there is a productive tension between sacraments and ritual action and either passive expectation or revolutionary action. This relationship is coupled with an idea of the church as a visible institution and cultural community of true believers.<sup>126</sup> If we relate this to our control model, we can see quite clearly that by endorsing only one of our protagonists we are endorsing a model of the church

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<sup>125</sup> Davis WLWD p 54.

<sup>126</sup> Davis Ibid.



that is deficient in some of the conditions of ecclesiality appropriate to the other. Moreover, these deficiencies become even more acute when we realise that endorsing only one of these models means making a choice between catholicity and unity on the one hand and holiness and apostolicity. For the church to be the church such a dichotomy is not sustainable.

Nevertheless, it might be suggested, from a Hauerwasian perspective, that Davis is doing nothing more than creating a pluriform Christianity for the purposes of serving the various religious needs of people. As such Davis would in Hauerwas's terms be guilty of generating consumer religion.<sup>127</sup> As we have seen, however, Davis does not compromise on the need for a distinctive commitment in the Christian life and identity. To this extent the practical ecclesiology that Davis envisions makes substantive, existential claims on the individual. On the other hand Davis might well criticise Hauerwas for "trying to hold the centre and keeping the boundaries closed,"<sup>128</sup> precisely the opposite of Davis vision of universality. Indeed, it is his critique of the dominant model of the church that by hardening the boundaries it loses its centre, thus forcing a compromise on truthfulness and character.

It is now clear that the answer to the question 'Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?' is at one and the same time neither and both. That is to say it is not better understood as a choice between Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics, rather it is best understood through Davis *and* Hauerwas together. Given the extent of the common ground that they share, we have two choices. The first is to take one position against the other and thus discard either critical theology

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<sup>127</sup> Hauerwas AN p 9, RA p 142.

<sup>128</sup> Conversation with Prof. Davis. Edinburgh Sept '97.

or ecclesial. The second, and we would argue, more truthful option is to place Davis and Hauerwas in conversational opposition to each other. Admittedly, this option would be more amenable to Davis than to Hauerwas, since Davis sees himself as part of a communicative tradition.<sup>129</sup>

There is, however, a second compelling reason for placing Davis and Hauerwas together. Hauerwas himself says:

“It might well be possible for others to emphasise a different conception of Christian existence while accepting the arguments concerning the nature of rationality and the significance of community. The gospel is too rich for any one account of Christian existence to be adequate. Different conditions remind us of parts of the Christian life we have forgotten. *The claims I make in this respect are therefore put forward as but one attempt to remind Christians what kind of life they are committed to living if they believe their lives are not their own but God’s.*”<sup>130</sup>

If, therefore, we understand Davis to be representative of one such alternative account of Christian existence, based on the necessity of the supernatural, identity and political action, then the italicised quote could well be a description of the ongoing programme of Davis’s critical theology. Consequently, we would suggest that Davis represents precisely one such ‘condition’ to remind us of part of the Christian life and would, in these terms, be understood to be operating at the very least contiguously with Hauerwas.

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<sup>129</sup> Davis agrees with this suggestion. Particularly as he sees himself in common cause with people of goodwill everywhere. Thus to the extent that Hauerwas presents a position of goodwill and openness, Davis and he can be conversation partners. Conversation, Edinburgh September ‘97

<sup>130</sup> Hauerwas TT p 12, my emphasis.

Consider for a moment Davis's suggestion that religious identity it is given by active participation in a universality to be realised in the future. Present working for a yet-to-be-realised universality can already unite people of different positions. That this is true of people in a shared tradition of either discourse or character is self-evident. We would suggest that by taking Hauerwas at his word, and including the likes of Davis as another attempt to remind Christians of the life to which they are committed, then, by the proleptic nature of the church both Davis and Hauerwas are working towards a similar 'hope for the eschaton' either through discourse or in character, we can conclude that they are already united. We must, nevertheless, consider the nature of the universality in question. To this end, in the next chapter we shall return, in conclusion, to the metaphor of pilgrimage common to both Hauerwas and Davis, and inquire, as to what conditions must prevail to allow Davis and Hauerwas to continue as fellow travellers.

## Chapter 7. Vision and Integrity in Practice

### 7.1 Introduction

In the conclusion to the previous chapter I suggested that the answer to the original dilemma for the church, concerning the choice between reason and tradition, would lie in asking of Davis and Hauerwas ‘Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?’ Expressed thus, it became clear that for the church the answer to the dilemma is both. That is to say, the resolution is not better understood as a having to choose between Davis and Hauerwas, as representatives of reason or tradition, rather it is better understood through Davis *and* Hauerwas together. Consequently, the dilemma is resolved into an issue of discovering the conditions necessary for maintaining these two apparently contradictory positions in a constructive partnership rather than a destructive opposition.

#### *7.1.1. Summary of the argument to date*

Before I move on to explore these conditions, however, it would be appropriate to summarise the argument of the thesis to date. I began in Chapter 1 with a description of modernity as the age of critical reason. From this starting point I explored the responses of the primary philosophical antecedents of critical theology and ecclesial ethics. Thus, a foundation was laid for the detailed, critical exposition of Davis and Hauerwas which followed.

The reason for that exposition was two fold. Firstly it was a means of comparing and contrasting Davis’s critical theology and Hauerwas’s ecclesial ethics

in the light of the challenge that each presented for the other.<sup>1</sup> Thus in Chapters 2 and 3 I provided a detailed exposition of Davis's position. In so doing I developed the theme of Davis's important, post-orthodox critical theology. While critical theology makes use of the philosophical insights of Jürgen Habermas, it does not simply import them. Davis criticises Habermas's overstated reliance on abstract reason and his understated appreciation of tradition in generating moral norms. I argued, therefore, that Davis's post-orthodoxy offered three important insights. First of all, it endeavours to realign theory and practice in the Christian life. Secondly, it shows how Habermas and the Enlightenment tradition have overstated the claims of rationality. Thirdly, it shows that Christianity, when theory and practice are properly aligned, and therefore eschewing orthodoxy, embodies a tradition of discourse that is not sectarian or oppressive. Finally, we suggested that Davis is pointing toward a much more radical agenda than either political or liberation theologies. The proper realignment of theory and practice leads to the possibility of a valid practical theology leading to the transformation of society in light of the transformative principle of Christian faith. I then moved on to analyse the promise implicit in critical theology with reference to Christian ethics and the church. This analysis focused on questions of religious and social identity, plurality, rationality and the shape and scope of tradition. These themes exposed a liberal agenda. This liberal agenda, I argued, led Davis to espouse creative disaffiliation rather than abandonment of the church. Creative disaffiliation leads to reformation and reformation means, for Davis, conceiving the church as a community of discourse.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I turned my attention to Stanley Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. Here I developed the theme of Hauerwas's distinctive, 'post-liberal' ecclesial

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<sup>1</sup> See Benhabib *Situating the Self* p 24, and note 4 of the Introduction.

theology. I noted that, as with Davis's attitude to Habermas, Hauerwas's attitude to MacIntyre was not uncritical and that, as a result, Hauerwas's 'post-liberalism' offered three important insights. First of all, as Christians our understanding and interpretation of reality is mediated through the narrative community of faith that is the church and the church in turn is Christological in focus. Secondly, Christian ethics, focused on the church as the normative community, in particular is a direct challenge to the theories of autonomy upon which liberal theologies and theories like those of Davis and Habermas are based. Thirdly, he insists on the exclusivity and separateness of the church from the world and the necessity, as he sees it, for renouncing the liberal priority of the self while acknowledging that all that is good comes to us not as a right but as a gift. Finally, as with Davis, this suggests a much more radical agenda than either political or liberation theologies, endeavouring as he does so to relate the concepts of practice, virtue, identity, narrative, character and tradition to form coherent ecclesial theological discourse that is not compromised by capitulation with modernity.

From here, to complete the comparison, I had to analyse the promise implicit in ecclesial ethics with reference to Christian ethics and the church. That is to say, authentic political action represents the tactical deployment of the art of maintaining a good society subject to the witness of the peaceable kingdom which, in the final analysis, for Hauerwas represents the conversation necessary for a people to discover the goods they have in common. This analysis took us through questions of religious identity, identity and the Christian tradition and plurality and the role of revelation. In the final analysis, the impact of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics on Christian ethics is to construe appropriate response to God's revelation in the church as the ongoing presence of Christ in the world. This presence has significant political and social consequences. From here we went on to analyse the

implications of ecclesial ethics for the church by revisiting the charge of sectarianism. In so doing we noted that Hauerwas's authentic political action was akin to the tactics of guerrilla warfare. From there we examined the possibilities of embracing the ecclesial counterculture and finally portrayed the church as a community of Christian character.

In Chapter 6 I argued that the church was a central concern for both critical theology and ecclesial ethics in terms of any attempt to redeem the promises of either. Davis and Hauerwas both reconfigure the church into the normative community that is appropriate to their theological positions, so Davis's church is a community of discourse and Hauerwas's is a community of character. As such Davis represents creative disaffiliation from the juridical-hierarchical church, that was bound into the mythical-visionary model of ecclesiology, in favour of a mystical-pragmatic model. Hauerwas, however, also represented creative disaffiliation but this time from the violent power-games of liberal polity and into a mythical-visionary model of the church. By testing these communities of discourse and character against a control model of the church, provided by Miroslav Volf, I was able to realise the complementary rather than oppositional nature of Davis and Hauerwas's models. Hence, I was in a position to return and address the original dilemma in another way: that was to ask of Davis and Hauerwas 'Whose Ecclesia? Which Disaffiliation?' Expressed thus, it became clear that for the church the answer to the dilemma is both. That is to say, the resolution is not better understood as a having to choose between Davis and Hauerwas, as representatives of reason or tradition, rather it is better understood through Davis *and* Hauerwas together. Consequently, the dilemma is resolved into an issue of discovering the conditions necessary for maintaining these two



apparently contradictory positions in a constructive partnership rather than a destructive opposition.

*7.1.2. The themes that have emerged*

In order to understand the extent of this possible constructive partnership, I will highlight the common ground shared by Davis and Hauerwas. We have seen that both Davis and Hauerwas are concerned with five similar issues. Firstly, the modern privatisation of religious conviction. This flows from the second area of concern that is the incoherence or excesses of modernity as the context for the church and its practices, both being sceptical about the merits or effectiveness of so called political theology as a response to this situation. The third point of shared concern is that the contemporary context has forced a divide between theory and practice generally, and in particular for the Christian tradition. This results in other familiar theological dichotomies such as reason and faith, reason and revelation, reason and tradition. The fourth point is that for a proper realignment of theory and practice we need to rediscover a more effective understanding of tradition and narrative. Fifth and finally, this realignment should issue in a practical ecclesiology that ought to facilitate authentic political action. That this is shared ground does not, however, overlook the fact that the conclusions which Davis and Hauerwas reach, and the promises implied, appear on the face of it to be at odds with each other.

In the face of these shared concerns three common themes have percolated to the surface through out this thesis. They are first of all, the transformative principle in critical theology and the performative aspect of ecclesial ethics. Secondly, the idea of ecclesial reform in critical theology and the idea of truthfulness in ecclesial ethics. Thirdly, the notion of non-violence and non-

coercion implicit in both critical theology and ecclesial ethics. In the remainder of this chapter I will focus on the first two themes. I will not raise a separate investigation or discussion of the third. This is for two reasons. First of all, in many ways this is implicitly the final reason for my contention that critical theology are complementary and provide necessary, mutual checks and balances. As such it has been discussed extensively throughout the thesis, mostly in reference to Hauerwas's politics of peaceful kingdom. However, it has also been introduced in terms of Davis's claim that the normative rightness or acceptability of any claim, when worked out in discourse, rests on the degree to which an uncoerced consensus is reached.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the emancipatory interest that grounds communicative action requires that participants in discourse adopt non-coerciveness as the regulatory norm in their action.<sup>3</sup> Thus the only 'force' presented in discourse is the 'force' or the weight of the rationally better argument. Davis discerns this condition from Habermas's ideal speech situation.<sup>4</sup> I do not, however, wish to be tied into a theoretical discussion of the role and limits of the principle of non-violence or non-coercion in the respective communities. That is the topic of another thesis.

Secondly, if I can demonstrate that transformation and performance as well as reform and truthfulness are sufficient conditions in themselves for an ongoing conversation, such a theoretical discussion can be avoided. That is to say that if the other principles are sufficient to generate a conversation, then the regulative principle of non-coercion falls into place as a conversational maxim, bearing in

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<sup>2</sup> Davis RMS p 200.

<sup>3</sup> Davis TPS pp 80 – 97.

<sup>4</sup> Davis TPS pp 88 – 89. This ideal speech situation is not ideal in any utopian sense but it is ideal in the sense that it is an implicit norm in all communicative action as an expectation of all participants in rational discourse.

mind Hauerwas's insight that Christian ethics should be prepared to generate the conditions for the right kind of conflict and resolution.<sup>5</sup>

### 7.1.3. Conclusion in Outline

With this in mind, it is my intention in this concluding chapter to explore further this relationship between transformation and performance as well as ecclesial reform and truthfulness. Davis's radical, post-orthodox, Critical theology suggests a unity between the mythical-visionary and the mystical-pragmatic models of the church. I have shown that Davis's understanding of ecclesia falls broadly into the mystical-pragmatic model while Hauerwas's radical, post-liberal ecclesial understanding represents the mythical-visionary. I have further argued that Davis's insight is basically correct and that Hauerwas provides an effective expression of the mythical-visionary model to be placed together with Davis. Moreover, we can now press the point and assert that Davis and Hauerwas not only provided complementary calls to vision and integrity in the ministry and mission of the church, but that they provided mutually corrective visions. This vision leads to an integrity in practice that allows for authentic political action and presence, grounded in proleptic and anamnestic solidarity in the face of humanity's negative contingencies. It is the purpose of this chapter to flesh out this claim.<sup>6</sup> To this end and picking up from the conclusion to the last chapter we must consider the nature of the universality in which I contend that Davis and Hauerwas are both participants and which I contend already unites them. In this chapter, and in conclusion to the argument, I will endeavour to explore the necessary conditions

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<sup>5</sup> See my discussion of this in Chapter 6.

<sup>6</sup> As we shall see later in this chapter, in the face of ultimate limit situations such as suffering and death, the practical ecclesiology of discourse and character that we endorse relies on hope and truthfulness to supply pastoral insight. Religious hope as described by Davis and Hauerwas contains an element of anamnesis, in the sense of faith as remembrance, and prolepsis in the sense of anticipated outcome. Truthfulness, is the skill of living patiently and confidently under these conditions.

for the constructive conversational participation that this universality requires, and examine vision and integrity in practice.

The chapter, therefore, will be laid out as follows. First I will explore the relationship between the transformative principle in critical theology and the performative aspect of ecclesial ethics in Davis and Hauerwas. This will lead us into a discussion of the consequences of reform and truthfulness. Thereafter, I will develop these themes further against the background of a challenge to the integrity of both discourse and character and thus demonstrate that, not only are critical theology and ecclesial ethics mutually compatible but they also provide a necessary check and balance each for the other. The result of this relationship is a more complete and integrated vision of the church. Finally, we shall conclude by showing that, by holding Davis and Hauerwas together in constructive partnership, we can endorse the possibility of the church's authentic political action in the public sphere.

## 7.2. Imagined Alternatives in Critical Theology and Ecclesial Ethics

Davis suggests that a vision empowers and failing this it remains a weak dream. To elevate it beyond the status of a weak dream, a vision has to have substantive content. The substantive content must, nevertheless, be subject to critique. The difference between a straight-forward description and analysis of a situation and an empowering vision of the same situation, therefore, is the imagining of alternatives.<sup>7</sup> This is true for both Davis and Hauerwas. Empowered by the vision of communicative rationality, Davis is led to explore new possibilities for the church. These new possibilities call for, on the one hand,

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<sup>7</sup> Davis "The End of Socialism?" in Centre for Theology and Public Issues Occasional Paper no 32 *After Socialism? The Future of Radical Christianity*. Edinburgh 1994 pages 3-10. See also page 103 of this thesis.

subordinating the oppressive, hierarchical, totalising church which Davis feels is inimical to liberation and hence the kingdom of God. On the other hand he sees the possibility of an alternative understanding of the church as a community of discourse, which is nevertheless loyal to its tradition. This is the vision to which Davis calls us. Meanwhile, Hauerwas is inclined to say, when confronted by contemporary culture's standards of truth and right, that "... 'We don't look at things that way,' and to nurture communities that offer an alternative vision."<sup>8</sup> The alternative vision that Hauerwas demonstrates is dependent on the ecclesial of character to embody the politics of discipleship. In this section, therefore, we shall explore the implications of the imagined alternatives presented to us by Davis's and Hauerwas's positions.

### 7.2.1 *Imagined Alternatives of a Transformative Critical Theology*

We noted, at the end of the last chapter, that Davis's ecclesial vision was proleptic and catholic and represented the real possibility of impetus towards reformation through the transformative principle of faith. For Davis, the fact that he sees the church as a community of discourse, and as the fundamental sacrament, making visible the manifest presence of Christ in the world has a secondary effect whereby the meaning of the church is to render visible and explicit universal human fellowship. To Davis's mind, "[t]radition is the author of such transformation, since it is the presence of the Spirit in human history..."<sup>9</sup> The tradition that Christians must recognise, as both the starting point and conclusion for their reflection, is the church. I therefore characterised Davis's ecclesiology with the phrase *semper reformanda*. In this process of continual reformation I asserted that critical theology, because it breaks the grip of orthodoxy, allows the

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<sup>8</sup> Placher *Unapologetic Theology* p 19.

<sup>9</sup> Davis TPS p 103.

church to comprehend the thrust towards, and the relevance of, emancipation wherever it is to be found working from an internal dynamic of the tradition itself. Indeed, it is the ultimate meaning of the church to embody the real possibility of liberation in a tradition institutionalised as a community of faith, orientated towards the mystical-pragmatic construction, rather than a community of feudal orthodoxy. Liberation, embodied thus in a fellowship allows the explication of the possibility of universal, free human fellowship.

At this stage, however, the relationship between critical theology and emancipatory practice requires some consolidation. For Davis the nature of this relationship lies in the imperative that critical theology possesses to attempt to dismantle the ruling concepts of religion taking religious texts, the standards of faith, and relocating them in a context that covers the whole field of cultural practices. For critical theology political action should be a consistent expression of, and be consistent with, its cultural analyses. These in turn develop from an engagement with religious texts to reveal their role in the ideological construction of the subject. Davis says, "... [t]he texts are to be mobilized beyond straightforward and received interpretations for a transformation of the subject within a wider political context."<sup>10</sup> By religious texts Davis is here extending the connotation of 'text' to religious traditions and practices, which in turn is definable

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<sup>10</sup> Davis WLWD p 4. Davis here acknowledges his debt to Terry Eagleton on the subject of revolutionary literary criticism whom he cites as follows. "It [revolutionary literary criticism] would dismantle the ruling concepts of "literature", reinserting "literary" texts into the whole field of cultural practices. It would strive to relate such cultural practices to other forms of social activity, and to transform the cultural apparatuses themselves. It would articulate its "cultural" analyses with a consistent political intervention. It would deconstruct the received hierarchies of "literature" and transvaluate received judgements and assumptions; engage with the language and "unconscious" of the literary texts to reveal their role in the ideological construction of the subject; and mobilize such texts, if necessary with hermeneutic "violence" in a struggle to transform those subjects within a wider political context." *Walter Benjamin; or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*. 1981, Verso. London. p 98. Davis, while seeing this as a paradigmatic statement is, nevertheless, wary of the connotations of 'revolutionary.' Hence the transformation that he seeks is less pretentious.



as the narrative produced by participants in the course of their life practice generally and as participants in the Christian tradition particularly. This broadening of the connotation of 'text' obviously correlates with Hauerwas's extension of the notion of interpretative community. By this extension Hauerwas encompassed the interpretation of political activity within the ambit of the interpretative community. Likewise, Davis extends interpretation beyond letters to cultural and social activity, the substance of narrative.

An excellent example of how this transformative principle, including the transformation of the subject, works in practice comes, for Davis, in the form of feminist theology. While feminist theology is a daughter of the academy, it is all the while driven by a political movement. Consequently, it can and does transcend the boundaries of the academy and received habits of thought of male dominated academic theology.<sup>11</sup> Although Davis does not actually pursue the implications of any possible connection between critical theology and Feminist theology, his critical theology is perceived by some to establish a 'warm current' that is amenable to Feminist theology and vice-versa.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note, however, Davis's significant critical insight that Feminist theology is of value because it is

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<sup>11</sup> We might also add European, white and middle class to male dominated. The following brief discussion of Feminist theology reflects themes that appear in *Theology and Praxis Volume II: Doing Ethics in Context. South African Perspectives*. C. Villa – Vicencio & J. De Gruchy (eds.) 1994 Davis Philip. Cape Town, introduces a discussion of Black, Feminist, African, and liberation theologies. The conclusions reached in the discussions of each of these emancipatory movements reflect the conclusions drawn by Schüssler Fiorenza in *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*. 1992. Beacon Press, Boston.

<sup>12</sup> See Marsha A. Hewitt *Charles Davis and the "Warm Current" of Critical Theology: A Feminist Critical Appreciation*. In TPCT pp 117 – 131. This warm, sympathetic current doesn't always extend to Hauerwas. For instance Gloria Albrecht has had a longstanding dialogue with Hauerwas to the effect that women's lives and experiences in the church contradict Hauerwas's vision of it. See "Article Review of In Good Company: The Church as Polis" *Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 50 no 2 1997 pp 219 – 227. See also Albrecht *The Character of our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church*. 1995 Nashville Abingdon Press. She argues, despite her sympathies, that Hauerwas's project of a characterful church of resident aliens fails because it results "not in the formation of a non-violent people but the maintenance of social privilege for dominant white society generally and for dominant white males in particular." p 138.



driven by a political movement that seeks transforming social justice grounded in the individual's, and consequently the community's, apprehension of the Transcendent.<sup>13</sup>

“With respect to these and other themes, the critical theology of many feminist writers and Davis express a utopian dimension best described in the words of Max Horkheimer as ‘the longing for the wholly other ... without which radical transformation is unthinkable’.”<sup>14</sup>

Seyla Benhabib refers to this longing as “... the regulative principle of hope.”<sup>15</sup> The regulative principle of hope in turn, translates into a demand for justice and human well-being and the assurance that, in the face of life's irremovable and unavoidable negativities,<sup>16</sup> there is some hope that these negativities do not have the last word. We shall return to the theme of these existential negativities in a later section.

In the meantime, we should note that the realisation of the transformative element in critical theology reflects a creative dynamic implicit to emancipatory movements. Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states that “... emancipatory movements create discursive communities based on shared assumptions and values which define boundaries and validate claims to authority.”<sup>17</sup> We might reflect on this in

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<sup>13</sup> Feminist theology is a critical theology. That is to say, feminist theology also aspires to the possibilities flowing from genuine intersubjectivity that will lead to both personal and social transformation. Feminist theology is actively involved in a critique of power structures and domination within theological and political discourse. For an excellent and intriguing discussion of these issues, which are outwith the scope of this present thesis, see Hewitt TPCT p 117. Moreover, we have already quoted from Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *But, She Said* noting the similarity between women's ecclesia and Davis's ecclesia as a community of discourse.

<sup>14</sup> Hewitt TPCT p 118. The internal quote, is a translation of Horkheimer's *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen, Ein Interview mit Kommentar von Helmut Gumnior*. 1970, Fruche-Verlag. Hamburg.

<sup>15</sup> Benhabib “Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance.” *Praxis International* 11, no 2. July 1991 p 147. See note 4 above with regard to a proper understanding of utopian.

<sup>16</sup> This is a phrase used by Davis RMS p 200 “There are many ways in which people deny death and pretend that the irremovable negativities of human existence can be ignored.

<sup>17</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza *But, She Said* p 129.

another way in order to press the point. Schüssler Fiorenza notes further that emancipatory movements properly understood, including feminism and therefore feminist theology, are not engaged in a struggle for equal rights simply to become the same as their oppressor. For feminist theology this means that women struggle to achieve the rights, benefits and privileges legitimately theirs as women and equal citizens but denied "... to them by the patriarchal and kyriarchal regimes of Western societies and religions."<sup>18</sup> For such an emancipatory movement to sustain the possibility of emancipation, it must operate not in biological or cultural bases for alliance but in political action. In this regard, the biological or cultural construct 'woman' can be replaced by a democratic, political construct. In other words, the struggle for emancipation becomes focused upon the political links that can be and are made in terms of race and class as much as in terms of gender. Interestingly Schüssler Fiorenza concludes that:

"Within the logic of radical equality one can theorize the *ekklesia* of women as the site of feminist struggles for transforming societal and religious institutions. Such a theoretical frame can displace the feminist alterity construct *woman* as the theoretical space from which to struggle and replace it with the democratic construct of the *ekklesia* of women, which is at once an historical and an imagined reality, already partially realized but still to be struggled for."<sup>19</sup>

By eschewing the sterile 'identity' debate, in favour of the logic of radical equality, we have here a focus on identity that is not fixed to the norms and contents of one, particular, orthodoxy. Rather, it relates to the political identity of 'humanity' under the regulative principle of hope, striving for transformation and emancipation. Here we have an account of a practical political struggle configured

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<sup>18</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza *But, She Said* p 129.

<sup>19</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza *But, She Said* p 130.

almost precisely along the lines of the political action imagined by Davis's community of discourse. I shall briefly illustrate the parallels. First of all, the sterile identity debate in feminism equates with Davis's understanding of orthodoxy, or received or traditional wisdom. This orthodoxy must be subject to critique for the debate to move on and the deadlocks broken. Secondly, the logic of radical equality provides the critical leverage that makes the critique possible. The logic of radical equality, while providing fresh illumination on the debate on identity nevertheless stands in the tradition of that same debate. Thirdly, the emancipation sought after is at once an historical and imagined reality, partially realised yet still to be struggled for. This relates precisely to Davis's 'yet to be realised universality'. The struggle for emancipation in this case focuses, therefore, on 'universal human fellowship' (political links) in order to corroborate the future actuality of the imagined possibility of emancipation. Thus it is part of the task and meaning of feminist theology, and the church, to make that fellowship 'visible and explicit'. We may conclude, therefore, that to render 'visible and explicit human fellowship' in the interests and for the sake of emancipation, implies for Davis recognising and forging the political links described by Schüssler Fiorenza. It is this that allows the transformative principle of faith to work in practice.

Though this may be the case for feminist theology we must ask if this transformative element is, however, a necessary consequence of embracing the mystical-pragmatic model of Christianity. On the one hand, emphasising the pragmatic inheritance articulates the Christian tradition as a practical way of life, understood as a response to the revelation of divine love. As we have seen, for Davis this is the locus of Christianity's authentic religious and, therefore, political content. On the other hand, emphasising the mystical inheritance of Christianity recognises a means of recovering a sense of the transcendent while providing an

insight into the inadequacy of all language in articulate expression of the transcendent. This is, essentially, a post-metaphysical realist position with two consequences.<sup>20</sup> The first consequence is that Christian realism, for Davis, does not mean stressing the objective reference of religious propositions, nor does it concern knowledge with regard to religious truth claims. It is, however, "...the rejection of a separate sacred world, and an affirmation of the sacredness and meaningfulness of the concrete reality of human, historical life."<sup>21</sup> As a way of life Christianity represents the transformation of the individual person and, in consequence, the community in response to the gift of transcendent love. What is foundational in Christianity for Davis, as we have observed, is not knowledge but love.

Nevertheless, the foundational love of which Davis speaks, in order to avoid distortion and abstraction, requires modulation. That modulation comes from a related tradition. Davis says:

"Those who like myself interpret Christianity primarily as a practice or way of life and thus ally ourselves with the pragmatic form of Christian faith cannot without loss and distortion pass over the contribution of visionary or apocalyptic Christianity. That contribution is to the effect that Christian faith is a genuinely new life, that it is not to be reduced to the limits of any mere humanism that it is ecstatic in its call to rapturous bliss and transcendent love. Christianity is not a moralism; it is a practice beyond human measure, founded in a vision of foolish love and impossible hope."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 4 of this thesis for an exposition of Davis's claim to be a Christian realist..

<sup>21</sup> Davis WLWD p 117.

<sup>22</sup> Davis WLWD p 94.

Here, the mystical-pragmatic model of the church represents the possibility of providing the transcendent foundation necessary for sustainable communication among human beings, despite their differences. The foundation of this possibility and the practice that it inspires is precisely described by the foolish love revealed in the story of the life death and resurrection of Christ. The ability to provide the foundation comes not from moralising nor from philosophising but from focusing on the practical human and political links that already partially unite humanity. The Christian churches to the extent that they can forge these links, Davis says, are "... still in an initial fashion able to unite people of different social groups and political opinions, which could serve to facilitate authentic conversation or colloquy in our present society."<sup>23</sup> The church represents, therefore, the possibility of the embodiment of a transforming, practical theology. In a later section we shall be returning to this issue in an endeavour to ascertain how that practical theology manifests itself in practice. At this point, however, we should note Davis's acknowledgement that the mystical-pragmatic model of the church is to be modified by an alternative insight that arises in the mythical visionary-model of the church.

The second consequence of Davis's focus on transcendent love has a bearing on our final reason for placing Davis and Hauerwas together. That is to say, this focus equates to a very similar focus in Hauerwas's post-liberalism. To make the point most forcefully, I will approach it from the another angle. It is generally considered that post-liberal thinkers are operating with a different ontological agenda, epistemology and so on, and consequently are broadly anti-metaphysical in their approach. As a result, they offer historical narrative and pragmatics as an alternative to autonomous, immanent reason. For instance, John Milbank claims

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<sup>23</sup> Davis WLWD p 122.

that he, and those of like mind to himself, are advocating universalism of love, that is made incarnate by the advent of Jesus and the Spirit in the church.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Davis is accused by Milbank, who would certainly align himself with those described as post-liberal, of operating with a modern onto-theological metaphysics which is at odds with the ontology of created being in time. And yet, as we see above, Davis is just as much concerned with the primacy of love and situated-ness as Milbank claims the post-liberals to be. To the extent that, like Davis, the post-liberals are 'Christian realists' they share the 'foundational' insight that love, not knowledge is the starting point for Christian reflection and so the motivation behind the 'appropriate human response' of Christian ethics. For Davis and for Hauerwas, therefore, ontological truth lies in faith and experience rather than propositions. Faith quite simply demands living one way rather than another.<sup>25</sup> Thus in analysing this way of living there are questions that we may appropriately ask and questions that we may not ask. We can ask, for instance, 'what is Christian?' We cannot, however, ask 'is Christianity true?' The latter question, in Lindbeck's<sup>26</sup> terms relies on a 'cognitive-propositional' approach to the Christian faith and this in turn commits us to essentialistic theories of meaning, time-bound, falsifiable cosmologies and soteriologies.<sup>27</sup> This would be a position, as I have demonstrated in our exposition, completely at odds with Davis's understanding of the proper disaffiliated relationship of the critical theologian to orthodoxy. Thus, Davis's and Hauerwas's basic positions have in common the

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<sup>24</sup> Milbank "Review of Religion and The Making of Society." *Theology* 98, 1995. pp 320 – 322.

<sup>25</sup> "The message of revelation is a praxis, *an ethical life*, a way of being and acting. It may be partially articulated in propositions. It may stimulate theoretical reflection. But it is essentially the establishment of a *practical way of life*." Davis RMS p. 95.

<sup>26</sup> Lindbeck *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*. 1984 Westminster Press Philadelphia. p 101.

<sup>27</sup> For an interesting discussion on Lindbeck on religious truth in relation to John Hick and world religions see Peter Slater "Lindbeck, Hick and the nature of religious truth." *Studies in Religion/Science Religieuses* 24/1 1995. pp 59 – 75.



‘Christian realist’ focus on transcendent love.<sup>28</sup> Where Davis is content to subject this basic position (as well as faith and hope) to communicative reason and its demands, Hauerwas will not. In Hauerwas’s case, therefore, this conclusion brings us on to a discussion of the matter of truthfulness in answer to the question ‘what is Christian?’

### 7.2.2 *Imagined Alternatives of Performative Ecclesial Ethics*

As I have argued throughout, Hauerwas’s vision of integrity in the ministry and mission of the church focuses on the counter cultural nature of the church as the normative community for theological and ethical discourse. This differs from Davis’s position to the extent that, although both recognise the significance of normative tradition, Davis wishes to emphasise what he calls the tradition of first level of narrative brought about through shared humanity rather than the tradition of second level narrative brought out through shared traditional orthodoxy. The focus on shared human experience allows him to forge the political links necessary for authentic political action. On the other hand, Hauerwas would call us into a tradition of praxis that is always subordinate to the tradition of orthodoxy. Davis’s position seems to emphasise the performative aspect of generating narrative. It would, therefore, be remiss not to re-iterate the significance of the performative aspects of Hauerwas’s ecclesial ethics.

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Runzo in *Is God Real?* (1993. MacMillan, London and Basingstoke) p xiv points out that the theological debate surrounding realism and ant-realism is not the same as the one in philosophy. The difference lies, he says in the theological focus on ‘what is the ontological status ... of a transcendent divine reality?’ McKinnon in *Hilary Putnam’s Internal Realism and Postliberal Theology*. PhD. University of Edinburgh 1997, suggests that “non realism seems for some theologians to hold out hope of a path that worth following. This again is because realists have to be forever explaining and justifying themselves. It is also seen as the path to follow if you reject modern foundationalism.” p 23. Here we have, in Davis and Hauerwas, an example of two theologians who are neither ‘non-realist’ nor ‘foundationalists’ thus suggesting as McKinnon does in her thesis that it is possible to be a realist and non-foundationalist. p 26.



Hauerwas sees the church, the Christian community, as the embodiment of truth. This community can be understood as performing the scripture and thereby witnessing to the only means of testing its validity. That is to say, Christian beliefs about "...God, Jesus, sin, the nature of human existence, and salvation are intelligible only if they are seen against the background of the church - that is a body of people that stand apart from the 'world' because of the peculiar task of worshipping a God whom the world knows not."<sup>29</sup> Thus, Hauerwas like Davis, is not so much concerned whether Christianity can be justified at a theoretical level since this would tend to a foundationalist conclusion. Rather, the truth or falsity of Christian claims lies in pragmatic criteria. For Hauerwas, because truth and authority are embodied in the Christian characterful community, truth claims can only be verified in regard to actualised events, people and places. As a consequence of this, Hauerwas is not so much interested in the truth or falsity of dogmatic or doctrinal claims as he is in the truthfulness of Christian lives. Truth, therefore, is not a virtue on its own. It can be distinguished but not separated from other "... measures of value - from consistency, righteousness, justice happiness satisfaction."<sup>30</sup> That is to say, truthfulness takes priority because it does more than provide an accurate picture of events - that would be the function of truth on its own. Truthfulness helps one go into the unknown without a false story.<sup>31</sup> He says:

"The true stories that we learn of God are those that help us to know what story we are and should be, that is, which gives us the courage to go on. Namely the story that is necessary to know God is the story that is also necessary to know the self, but such knowing is not passive accommodation to an external object. Rather such knowing is more like a skill that

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<sup>29</sup> Hauerwas AtN p 42.

<sup>30</sup> Hauerwas TT p 80.

<sup>31</sup> Hauerwas TT p 80.

gives us the ability to know the world as it should be -  
it is a knowing that changes the self.”<sup>32</sup>

In this sense, for Hauerwas, the assessment of truth claims is a skill. As such we learn the skill of assessment through living within a tradition that nurtures that skill. In turn the skill is always as subordinate to the practice of being the church.<sup>33</sup> In other words, according to Hauerwas, one learns how to judge the truth of any story by learning to live truthfully within one story. This claim, if it works, allows Hauerwas to avoid falling into the trap of either epistemological relativism or naive epistemological realism. On the one side relativism suggests that any assessments of a truth claim is circular at best or impossible at worst because there is no neutral vantage point. On the other side, naive realism depends on an unsustainable level of objectivity.<sup>34</sup>

Learning to live truthfully, Hauerwas tells us, equips the individual Christian, and hence the church, with the conceptual tools with which to make pragmatic decisions about the relative values of particular ways of life or individual truth claims. Nevertheless, Hauerwas must be held to account for the extent to which he is able, or not able, to articulate a coherent case for saying that one way of life or proposition is better or worse, of more value or less value, than another.

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<sup>32</sup> Hauerwas TT p 81.

<sup>33</sup> See my description of practices in regard to MacIntyre in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

<sup>34</sup> For more on this topic see *Hilary Putnam's Internal Realism and Postliberal Theology*. Dr MacKinnon's convincingly argued thesis is that George Lindbeck, another 'post-liberal' claims a very similar pragmatic method to make sense of the theological truth claims he makes concerning the nature of doctrine but because of the lack of critique of theology's foundations. She argues that by augmenting Lindbeck's position with the pragmatically charged internal-realism of Hilary Putnam, theological truth claims may in fact have some public viability. In her conclusion Dr MacKinnon develops these themes along-side the insights of David Tracy. So while she holds that Lindbeck ultimately, and without the help of Putnam, ends up in a ghetto of self-description, she backs the development of a distinctive critical theology. Dr MacKinnon, in dealing with Hauerwas, does not feel that he pulls off the 'pragmatic' angle on assessment either and ultimately he too falls into irretrievable sectarian relativism. On this matter, as is clear from the thesis I disagree and would rather suggest that Hauerwas has managed, unapologetically, to turn this alleged vice into a virtue, and has thus come some of the way out of the ghetto.

In other words, if there is no such thing as 'truth' in a propositional sense, to avoid displaying the worst inconsistencies of relativism he must be able to make a coherent case for announcing that one way of life, life-style or practice is better or worse than another.<sup>35</sup> One case that did, in point of fact, directly challenge Hauerwas was the mass suicide of the followers of Jim Jones's People's Temple cult.<sup>36</sup>

His response to this situation was that, in the final analysis, it was a tragedy brought about by adherence to false beliefs. Hauerwas concludes that the people in Jonestown were not wrong to give their lives for their beliefs. Rather, they were in the wrong because the cause for which they died was not worthy. For Hauerwas the clue to the falsity of Jones's claims lay in his command to suicide "...[o]ur life is not for us to do with as we please, but rather we must learn to look on our life as a gift that is not ours to dispose of. ... Those ... who would contemplate and indeed even practice suicide as did those at Jonestown must be judged worshippers of a false god."<sup>37</sup> Violence generally and suicide in this particular case represents "...a sure sign that something has gone wrong with the claim to worship the God of truth and peace."<sup>38</sup> In other words the practices of the people in Jonestown, in terms of their violent behaviour belied any verbal assertions of confessions that

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<sup>35</sup> MacKinnon op. cit. "Theological excursions into post-modernity are, therefore, problematic. Acceptance of extreme relativism and the incommensurability of languages will, I suggest, leave theology in a ghetto unable to say anything to anybody." p 25 . This is a position that Hauerwas must avoid because he desperately wants to be able to say something to everybody.

<sup>36</sup> Hauerwas AtN pp 91 - 106 "On Taking Religion Seriously: The Challenge of Jonestown." It is important to note the features that the People's Temple cult had in common with Christianity. "Like the early Church, the people's temple thought in terms of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, a struggle that required of the disciple a complete sacrifice both privately and publicly - wealth, status, money, health, family even life itself. The Christian community took precedence over one's own family. Thus it is not for the Church to follow secular critics and attack the Peoples Temple for interfering with personal autonomy: the church should have no stake in underwriting the notion that religion belongs only to the private realm." Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p 88 - 89.

<sup>37</sup> Hauerwas "On Taking Religion Seriously" p 101 -102.

<sup>38</sup> Hauerwas "On Taking Religion Seriously" p 106.

they might have made concerning their commitment to 'the God of truth and peace.' Truthfulness, therefore lies in the continuity between what is confessed and the practices that result from that confession. Equally, this provides a pragmatic criterion for determining the 'truth' of the object of the confession. Thus, narratives such as that of Jonestown can only be countered by the narrative of conviction that is fostered in the truthful community of character that is the church.

For Hauerwas, the power of truthfulness is that it is the effective antidote to politics of violence. Notwithstanding this, we should still reserve a question for Hauerwas on the subject of Jonestown. As outsiders it is easy for us to criticise events in Jonestown after the fact, either from the Hauerwasian truthfulness perspective or from the perspective of the liberal concern with the curtailing of autonomy. Nevertheless, Hauerwas has not accounted for the fact that the victims, the insiders, lived and died true to their convictions, even if these convictions might be deemed wrong with hindsight. Why could they, as individuals, not perceive the falsity of Jones's position? Clearly, they adopted a story and developed a character in and through the community. That this character was not good from either of these perspectives is clear, as is the fact that they became victims of this false teaching. But at what point could they have done anything about it? To suggest, on the one hand, that they might have, at some point, seen through Jones weakens Hauerwas's case for pragmatic criteria because it implies that there must be a degree of critical reservation about any narrative and this mitigates against total truthfulness. On the other hand, we should not assume, even according to Hauerwas that these people were informed by only one narrative. Which begs two questions as to why another narrative may not have illuminated for them the falsity of Jones's teaching and why they suspended all

critical reservations about Jones? Nevertheless, the principle force of Hauerwas's understanding of truthfulness in preference to propositional truth is not greatly diminished.

### 7.2.3 Reform and Truthfulness

At this point I wish begin to draw together the conclusions concerning reform and truthfulness as the significant features of Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. These conclusions are concerned with stating, first of all, that reform and truthfulness are not only theologically compatible but that they are mutually dependent. Secondly I will consider, in light of this claim the implications for the relationship between reform and truthfulness, ecclesia and political action. I will explore these matters by showing how, on a theoretical level, Davis's understanding of communicative action and the implicit validity claims relate to similar validity claims implicit in religious, and particularly Christian, hope. In the course of this investigation I will show that Hauerwas's idea of truthfulness augments Davis's understanding of hope and hence communicative action, and informs a better understanding of the function of the normative community that communicative action relies upon.

The first case to present, therefore, is that reform and truthfulness are not only mutually compatible, but mutually dependent. According to Davis's reading of Habermas, communicative action is human action directed at reaching mutual understanding and agreement.<sup>39</sup> As such it makes possible a non-violent non-instrumental procedure for justifying and co-ordinating interpersonal relationships based on rational consensus. In turn, consensus is attained by complying with

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 1 of this thesis and, for the following, Lalonde in TPCT p 8, and White *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas*. Chapter 3.

implicit, universal validity claims of communicative competence. This theory holds, with an insight gleaned from philosophical pragmatism, that there are three universal validity claims signified within every ordinary speech act. These claims are truth, normative rightness and truthfulness, each of which corresponds to a particular mode of argumentation: scientific, practical and aesthetic discourse respectively. As we have seen Davis endorses, with critical reservation, Habermas's insights. He notes that "... [o]nly if speakers are willing to justify their validity-claims in argumentation, namely a form of discourse in which validity claims are thematized and reasons given for them, can there emerge a rationally motivated agreement, a rational consensus, on how to co-ordinate actions."<sup>40</sup> While it is the case that all three validity claims are implicitly raised in every speech act only one kind is explicit at any one time.

I argued in Chapter 2 that Davis foresaw limits on the role of reason in theological discourse. The limit on communicative reason arose because of the tension between its pragmatic, procedural character and the substantive content inherent in its structure. The substantive element required some minimal reference to a tradition of discourse. This tradition of discourse can be understood, for Davis, in terms of 'hope' in relation to reason.<sup>41</sup> We will analyse the practical theological import of this claim in more depth in a later section of this chapter when we deal with religious hope in the face of the challenge of the limit situations of suffering and death. For the moment, though, I wish to make a theoretical observation that relates Davis's community of discourse with, its insight on hope, to Hauerwas's understanding of truthfulness.

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<sup>40</sup> Davis RMS p 194.

<sup>41</sup> Davis has appealed variously to Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer and Hannah Arendt to flesh out the notion of remembrance and history and of hope generally considered. TPS p 142 – 143, 134 – 138. RMS p 71, 118.



We should note, therefore, that Christian hope, as understood by Davis, presents its own series of validity claims that coincide with truth, rightness and truthfulness.<sup>42</sup> The first validity claim implicit in hope arises from Davis's notion that, as the expression<sup>43</sup> of an inner conviction or stance, hope makes a validity claim to "... truthfulness, sincerity and authenticity."<sup>44</sup> In this light, two criteria apply to the coherence of hope in the face of the challenging situations. First of all, "... consistency of behaviour is the key criterion in determining sincerity. The implications of Hauerwas's politics of discipleship are obvious. Hauerwas's insight into the politics of discipleship means that consistency implies truthfully living out one's convictions. The second criterion comes in the form of a problem to be avoided, that is to say the problem of self-deception. The correct response to which is "... therapeutic dialogue..."<sup>45</sup> in the face of distorting self-deception. Here again we might profitably invoke Hauerwas's understanding of truthfulness. We shall return to this discussion in the next section of this chapter.

The second validity claim implicit to hope is that of normative rightness. According to Davis this concerns the practical attitude of confidence governing action.<sup>46</sup> "When challenged, the acceptability [of normative rightness] is established by discourse or argumentation directed toward achieving an uncoerced consensus."<sup>47</sup> This vision, of course, implies and requires a network of intersubjective relationships wherein the argument can be worked out. In other words, the claim to rightness presupposes an interpretative community. In

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<sup>42</sup> We religious hope generally in Chapter 2. The matter at hand is a consideration of Christian hope in particular.

<sup>43</sup> By 'expression' Davis implies linguistic, bodily, behavioural, affective and emotional. RMS p199

<sup>44</sup> Davis RMS p 199.

<sup>45</sup> Davis RMS p 200.

<sup>46</sup> Davis RMS p 200.

<sup>47</sup> Davis RMS p 200.



Christian terms the claim to rightness involves, at the very least, reference to the norms of the traditional Christian interpretative community or church. As Davis notes, and as it is easy to observe, the traditional interpretations of matters such as hope are by no means clear cut. The impact of Liberation Theology, the development of political theology, the debates concerning the ordination of women: all of these issues, and more besides, suggest that there is a tension within the Christian community concerning the interpretation of hope. The matter of working out the rightness of claims with acknowledged reference to the Christian community requires, as Hauerwas suggests and Davis acknowledges, that practical reason is not a disembodied process based solely upon abstract principles but the process of a community in which every member has a role to play. Such a process does not disdain the importance of logical rigour for aiding in their deliberation, but logic cannot be a substitute for the actual process of discernment.<sup>48</sup> This conception of practical reason represents a process of discernment which in turn is shaped by the virtues or character of the community itself,<sup>49</sup> and as we have noted character relates to truthfulness. Further to this, practical reasoning, he says, should be the activity of the whole community, not merely the function of the expert.

The last validity claim to be explored in relation to hope is the claim to truth. This exploration can be reduced to a two fold distinction for Davis: that is to say, first the affirmation of the objective possibility of and secondly the future actuality of hope.<sup>50</sup> While we might endorse the future possibility of hope on the basis of reasons sufficient to suggest the possible existence of the state of affairs that we wish to describe, this says nothing about the future actuality. The actual

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<sup>48</sup> Hauerwas CET p 73 (67 – 87), PK pp 130 – 134, CC p 54.

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 5 of this thesis

<sup>50</sup> Davis RMS p 202.

realisation of the possibilities of human existence is often frustrated by the negative contingencies of that very existence. It is at this point that Davis wishes to put the final seal on the necessity of the supernatural in relation to the otherwise disconsolate nature of human existence in the face of these negative contingencies.<sup>51</sup> Davis's example in regard to the claim to truth involves the hope for a just and emancipated society, central to both critical theology and Habermas's communicative action. Davis claims that, if the conditions of that society are freedom, reciprocity and shared responsibility in social and political life, then, according to his understanding of Habermas, an orientation towards that goal, and presentation, in some measure of those conditions, is written into the very fabric of communicative action. Hence, since we are social subjects and, therefore, "... participants in communicative action we cannot but affirm, in performance if not in words, the norms and values of communicative rationality. Because of that, we are justified in seeing our hope ... as an intrinsic possibility of our actual situation."<sup>52</sup> Thus the extent to which an appropriate social situation is present is the extent to which communicative action is possible. Davis does not, however, provide us with a description of the practicalities of such a situation. In this regard we can profitably turn to Hauerwas and present his understanding of Christian social ethics. That is to say, that the first task of the church is not to make the world just, but to make the world the world.<sup>53</sup>

This raises two matters. The first is that as Christians, within the ambit of the church, Davis maintains that it is our first task to discern these conditions of freedom, reciprocity and shared social responsibility in the fabric of our normative

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<sup>51</sup> We should note here Davis's understanding of the word supernatural. It refers not to beings but to the grace that elevates human beings to participate in the divine life. RMS p 9. See Chapter 2 n 9.

<sup>52</sup> Davis RMS p 202.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapters 2 & 3 of this thesis for an exposition of this claim.

community before we can comment on their possibility or actuality in a broader context. This is precisely what I take Hauerwas to mean when he talks of the church not having a social ethic but being a social ethic.<sup>54</sup> Realising these concerns within the church as a proleptic body, as Hauerwas would suggest, enables us to comment, advise and act in the public sphere precisely because we are affirming, at least in performance, the norms and values in our own tradition that link us politically to the wider human fellowship. So, Davis's call for a politicisation of the church is not at all incompatible, and is in fact illuminated by Hauerwas's insights. The second issue is the extent to which the substantive content of hope suggested by a tradition might be obscured or limited by the orthodoxy of that very tradition. Obviously, in this respect, we must endorse Davis's position of disaffiliation that mitigates orthodoxy. However, to endorse Davis is not to deny the significance of the performative aspect of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics.

As we noted at the end of Chapter 4 and in Chapter 5, the church is to be recognised in and through the character of the people who constitute it. Further, the extent to which this character is in evidence is the mark of the truthfulness of the church's witness. Consequently, the shape of the church reflects the patterns of the coexistence of its members and this, in turn is determined by their character as disciples. The key to understanding the shape of the church with regard to this third characteristic lies in the first characteristic, which is to say, Hauerwas's understanding of the church as a body that performs the politics of the kingdom. This performative aspect is most apparent in the church's sacramental activity. Hauerwas notes, therefore, that the community that he describes as marked by holiness is not a community of moral perfection, but of a people who have learned not to fear one another and thus are capable of love. Individuals do not go ahead,

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<sup>54</sup> Hauerwas RA p 43, COC p 40, PK p 99, AN p 74, CET p 101.

he suggests, with their own meals alone, nor with their own lives alone, but have learned to live in the presence of others without fear and envy. They learn that forgiveness of the enemy, even when the enemy is oneself, is the way God would have his kingdom accomplished.<sup>55</sup> These lessons are learned in the performance of the actions themselves, being the church and becoming the church are one in the same. To put it another way, the church possesses a certain insight into the way that people might best live their lives together in light of the revelation of God. People learn to appreciate these insights, not because they are able to give intellectual assent to them but because to be part of the church is to perform these actions. The pattern of the church, therefore, represents a pattern of acceptance, of forgiveness and willingness to forgive, including reconciliation. To the extent that freedom, reciprocity and shared responsibility are the conditions necessary for a just and emancipated society, the embodiment and performance of a just and emancipated society is anticipated in the action of forgiving and forgiveness and, hence, in the church. Here we can see that the performative aspect of Hauerwas's community of character bears a startling resemblance to the performative affirmation of the norms and values of communicative rationality that Davis has discerned. Performing *ecclesia*, then, gives substance to the norms and values intimated by Davis's exposition of hope. Likewise, these norms and values seem to be central to both the *ecclesia* of discourse envisioned by Davis and the *ecclesia* of character envisioned by Hauerwas.

The second related conclusion that we can draw from identifying the significance of reform and truthfulness as characteristics of the *ecclesia* of discourse and character arises from the very idea of a normative community and its role in political activity. Hauerwas suggests that:

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<sup>55</sup> Hauerwas PK p 110.

“... if the church, which after all is a public institution, can be the kind of community that manifests the political significance of virtue then the church may well have a political function not often realized. Moreover, to be such a community is not to withdraw from ‘society’ but rather to stand within our society making present what would otherwise be absent.”<sup>56</sup>

Rasmussen points out that, according to Hauerwas, Christian ethics is an ethics for friends, for people sharing an ongoing tradition, arguing together about what following Jesus Christ means.<sup>57</sup> Further to this, Hauerwas maintains that all Christian ethics are social ethics “... because all our ethics presuppose a social, communal, political starting point – the church.”<sup>58</sup> As all Christian ethics are social ethics he can suggest, as we have seen, that a richer conception of politics is in order. This richer conception of politics offers people a sense of participation in an adventure. “For finally what we seek is not power, or security, or equality, or even dignity but a sense of worth gained from participation and contribution to a common adventure. Indeed, our ‘dignity’ derives exactly from our sense of having taken part in such a story.”<sup>59</sup> The adventure, or story, to which Hauerwas alludes is, in fact, the story of an ongoing “community of moral discourse”<sup>60</sup> that renders the character of God before the world.

That is to say, Hauerwas conceives of the church as presenting a process of discussion the parameters of which are given by the church itself. This is where we encounter a problem. If the discussion that Hauerwas envisages as necessary for the church to be the church is already prescribed by the church in terms of orthodoxy,

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<sup>56</sup> Hauerwas CET p 195.

<sup>57</sup> Rasmussen *The Church as Polis* p 262.

<sup>58</sup> Hauerwas RA p 81.

<sup>59</sup> Hauerwas COC p 13.

<sup>60</sup> Hauerwas PK pp 130 – 134 and CET pp 67 – 68.

then it would be very easy for the conversation to bog down in torpid conservatism and become an internal, dogmatic discourse with no hope of accessibility or relevance. This is precisely the spectre of sectarianism that lies behind so much suspicion of Hauerwas's position. In Chapter 5 we discussed this matter and showed that Hauerwas is indeed a sectarian, but not in any facile sense. We showed that by conceiving of the church's political action in terms of tactic rather than strategy, Hauerwas managed to turn the alleged vice into a virtue. At this point, however, we would suggest that something more is needed to allow Hauerwas to adopt a more detached relationship to the inevitable dogmatic orthodoxy that militates against the type of ecclesial discourse that he in fact advocates. Otherwise he will be unable, fully and truthfully, to render the character of God to the world.

Hauerwas's relationship to orthodoxy, it is now clear, can feasibly be moderated by employing the insights we have gleaned from Davis's understanding of the church as a community of discourse. The significant methodological insight that we should bring to bear arises from Davis's understanding that the message of revelation is a praxis, an ethical life, a way of being and acting, a practical way of life. The necessary condition for this practical way of life is that the normative community that is the locus of orthodoxy, is reconfigured as a community of discourse.

We can conclude that reform and truthfulness, taken together, provide the space and the impetus for an understanding of critical theology and ecclesial ethics that, rather than describing a deadlock, describe the boundaries of an ongoing conversation. This conversation, in practice, describes the proper boundaries of the community of moral, ecclesial, theological and political discourse that both Davis



and Hauerwas identify as necessary for the church to carry on its ministry and mission with integrity. In other words, to bring Davis and Hauerwas together leaves us with a more full understanding of the church that is at one and the same time an ecclesia of discourse and of character.<sup>61</sup> This image of the church is one that participates in reform and truthfulness, as well as vision and integrity in practice. Moreover, our discussion of hope makes it clear that both Davis and Hauerwas are concerned with the transformation of fate into destiny.<sup>62</sup> Hauerwas says that “[c]ommunities formed by a truthful narrative must provide the skills to transform fate into destiny so that the unexpected, especially as it comes in the form of strangers, can be welcomed as gifts.”<sup>63</sup> Equally, it should be noted here that, for Hauerwas, the transformation of fate into destiny is the transformation from the domination of the exigencies of human beings into realising a place in the destiny of creation. In other words, as Davis suggests, participating in the divine life and promise. The question now arises as to how we might best develop this more full understanding of the vision and integrity of the church. To this end, in the following section, we shall return to explore the thematic metaphor of pilgrimage used by both Davis and Hauerwas in order to settle the conditions for their continuing journey as fellow travellers.

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<sup>61</sup> This community, as we have seen, is also holy, catholic and apostolic (see Chapter 6 of this thesis). Interestingly Karl Barth says that “...the term ‘holy’ when applied to the church, to God’s work and to believers has then no direct moral meaning. It does not mean that these people are particularly suited to come near to God, to deserve his revelation, that these things are particularly adapted to serve God. Rather, holiness is conferred upon them as a matter of the fact that God has chosen them, both men and things, in order to reveal himself in them. The notion of catholicity is quite near that of holiness. The Church, being different from any other human community, thereby is catholic, that is universal. She is limited by no barrier, either of state or of race, or of culture. Exclusively and properly belonging to no one, the Church belongs to everyone. She is really ‘national’ because she is really ‘independent’. She belongs to every man because she belongs to no man in particular.” Jean-Louis Leuba (ed) & Gabriel Vahanian (trans.) *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary of the Apostles’ Creed According to Calvin’s Catechism*. 1958 (1964) Fontana. London pp 116 – 117. The similarities to Hauerwas’s position should be obvious given Hauerwas’s association with the Yale ‘School’. However it is interesting to note how similar Barth’s comments catholicity are to Davis’s.

<sup>62</sup> Wells *Transforming Fate into Destiny* p 2

<sup>63</sup> Hauerwas COC p 10.



### 7.3. The Pilgrim Vision<sup>64</sup>

In this section we return to a thematic metaphor common to both Davis and Hauerwas: the metaphor of pilgrimage. Davis suggests that the church represents a pilgrim people of God, a diaspora in the sense of the Israelites of the Exodus. Davis's post-orthodox vision can be summed up thus "... we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come."<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, Hauerwas is equally at home in the margins, where the church is to embody a vision and story that is radically different from the mainstream of culture, and which will, in turn, tend to a different way of life. For Hauerwas, too, the quote above would be apposite.

My suggestion is that the political activity of the church, with Davis and Hauerwas in productive conversation rather than opposition would realign authentic political activity in terms of both political action and presence, which

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<sup>64</sup> I use the metaphor 'pilgrim' here for two reasons. The first is because, as I have said, it is a theme that recurs in the work of both Davis and Hauerwas. Secondly, it reflects a line from W.B. Yeats's poem *When You are Old* which, it seems to me, epitomises an appropriate response to the negativities of human existence that maintains both the integrity of hope and avoids the trap of a false web of significance. (see pp 320 – 330)

When you are old and grey and full of sleep  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false and true;  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur a little sadly, how love fled  
And Paced upon the mountains overhead,  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

<sup>65</sup> Hebrews 13:13.

reflects both proleptic and anamnestic solidarity with the oppressed. For Davis authentic political action involves the recreation of society in light of the transformative principle of faith, which begins with the politicising of the church. For Hauerwas authentic political action lies primarily in developing the practices learned by Christians within the Christian community, such that the church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic. Hence, both action and presence define the politics of the church. Thus understood, the marginal nature of Christian existence today might be seen as much as a blessing as a curse.

“... the margin is not a strange place for Christians; it is not only a problem but a place of opportunity too. Indeed, one could argue that it is a more proper place for Christians to be, than at the centre of things. After all, Jesus himself was a marginalised person, who ‘suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.’”<sup>66</sup>

As a place of opportunity for the pilgrim people of God, with no fixed city, the margins describes both the route and the nature of the journey of the creative disaffiliate. As we have argued, Davis and Hauerwas, as creative disaffiliates, converge on the margins of a plural society in a secular age wherein beliefs, allegiances and practices still retain some public currency. The opportunity that they experience here is one that fosters the vision of a public, practical theology founded on a declared moral discourse eschewing the limitations of sectarianism. Neither Davis nor Hauerwas are, in the end, willing to abandon commitment to the shared public arena in his quest for a theology arising from the specific witness of a community of faith.<sup>67</sup> To attempt to understand the conditions necessary for

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<sup>66</sup> Forrester *Encounter With God* 1983. T&T Clark, Edinburgh. p 176. The internal quote comes from Hebrews 13:13.

<sup>67</sup> See also Forrester *Beliefs, Values and Policies: Conviction Politics in a Secular Age*. 1989 Oxford Clarendon. Forrester presents here a community based theological discourse that does not compromise on a commitment to shared public arena and standards. He is concerned with

Davis and Hauerwas to continue as fellow travellers we shall now explore a practical issue that poses a fundamental challenge to both a community of discourse and a community of character. That is to say we shall explore the challenge that suffering and death offers to both Davis and Hauerwas's theologies.

This exploration arises for four reasons. First of all, it brings us back to the shadow of nihilism raised by both Habermas and MacIntyre in response to Nietzsche.<sup>68</sup> Secondly, Davis notes that human communication, at the heart of his Critical theology, faces the ultimate challenge of the "...the death of its participants."<sup>69</sup> Thirdly, Hauerwas notes that truthfulness, at the heart of his ecclesial ethics, requires a language and narrative that will enable us to face "... our own and other's death without weaving false webs of personal significance."<sup>70</sup> Fourthly, the vulgar fact of death presents the church with a serious pastoral and political issue that we shall argue generates a paradigm for theological responses to the other issues. In exploring this issue we will be able again to observe the manner in which Davis and Hauerwas represent the possibility of serious dialogue which will inform the possibility of authentic political presence and action in the public sphere witnessing to the character of God an both proleptic and anamnestic solidarity.

### *7.3.1 Suffering and death, the ultimate challenge to communication and community*

In this section it is our task to consider the reality of suffering and death as the ultimate challenge to both communicative solidarity, as understood by Davis, and community as understood by Hauerwas. This is a challenge to which the

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developing a theology that will become part of the shared language of the good within a pluralist culture.

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 1of this thesis.

<sup>69</sup> Davis RMS p 151.

<sup>70</sup> Hauerwas TT p?...

church must respond in its pastoral office on a daily basis and as such it presents an excellent lens with which to examine the co-operation of the Davis and Hauerwas's community of discourse and character. Moreover, it is a lens that will bring into sharp focus once more the implications of Davis's and Hauerwas's concerns with transforming fate into destiny. Davis describes for us the problem created by the destruction of communication by death. He says "... one cannot consistently take a stand for communicative rationality and ignore the aporia created by the destruction of communication by death."<sup>71</sup> For Hauerwas too suffering and death present a problem for the community of character. The fact of suffering, death and other tragedies tempts us to weave false webs of personal

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<sup>71</sup> Davis RMS p 204 & TPS p 148. Davis is not the first to pick up this particular issue, both Helmut Peukert and Rudolf Siebert raise the matter. Peukert, in *Science, Action, and Fundamental Theology: Toward A Theology of Communicative Action*, suggests that Habermas's theory of communicative action demands a theological foundation if it is to maintain its rational coherence and rigour. He claims that "a certain convergence can be established between contemporary reflection on the fundamental principles of theology on the one side and the results of research into the philosophy of science on the other. It seems to me that the point of convergence lies in communicative action." (Peukert Ibid p xxiii) The specific moment of convergence for Peukert lies in the disclosure of an aporetic moment in the structure of communicative action itself. The aporetic moment centres on the death of the innocent other in history. If the theory of communicative action is to provide a normative foundation for the identity of the human agent acting and interacting in history, then it must be able to take account of the substantial contributions made to this identity of persons now dead (Peukert Ibid p 171 – 172). That is to say communicative solidarity with the dead is required by the logic of communicative action. Such solidarity would be impossible in Habermas's view, and the lack of such solidarity would render the new social identity a meaningless deception. However, rather than taking this as the signal for rejecting the theory of communicative action, Peukert seeks to move for its completion. The completion can be realised, he argues, by demonstrating how the praxis of communicative action points beyond itself to a reality that saves the other in death, and therefore saves the identity made possible by communicative action. He says: "This reality disclosed in communicative action, asserted as the saving reality for others and at the same time as the reality that through this salvation of the other makes possible one's own temporal existence unto death, must be called 'God.' Within a situation of communicative action, ... the reality of God becomes *identifiable* and *nameable* through the communicative action itself. In this way the basic situation of the disclosure of the reality of God and its identifiability, and hence at the same time the origin of the possible discourse about God, are given." (Peukert Ibid p 245). The identity and name of God ultimately professed by Peukert is the risen Christ. The resurrection of Jesus, he argues can be seen as empowering an anamnestic existence in universal solidarity, and as the impetus to suggest the possibility of such an existence through the manner of one's own communicative action (Peukert Ibid p 226 – 227). This assertion contains echoes of Davis's insights into religious hope, and as we have already pointed out, brings Davis back to the necessity of the supernatural (Davis RMS p18 & 188ff and chapter 2 p 60 of this thesis). Unlike Peukert, however, Davis does not make any claims about the identity of the transcendent object of faith.

significance, and thus compromise on the criterion truthfulness. It is at this point that Davis's investigation of religious hope is, once more, so illuminating and in this setting of practical concern needs further elaborating.

The problem that suffering and death present is the problem of abandonment.<sup>72</sup> Abandonment suggests the confrontation of the loss of possibilities for human fulfilment in death. In the face of this limit situation, affirmation of the possibility of an ultimate fulfilment of human needs and desires must somehow be underwritten. Davis, developing the exposition of hope turns to the particular significance of religious hope properly understood. Religious hope, Davis suggests, expresses the "... appeal to a transcendent source or power that underwrites not only the possibility but also the future actuality, together with the present anticipation, of that ultimate fulfilment, the object of human hope."<sup>73</sup> The future actuality of what is hoped for is, for Davis, further grounded in an event of divine disclosure or experience of the transcendent. He says, "... as a contingent gift the fact of final fulfilment has to be guaranteed by a revelatory event."<sup>74</sup> He claims further that the correct theological understanding of these revelatory events

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<sup>72</sup> Siebert describes significance of the aporetic moment thus: the "... longing that the murderer will ultimately not triumph over the innocent victim" (Siebert *The Critical Theory of Religion*, p xii). In other words, Siebert again is concerned that the value of universal solidarity central to communicative action is rendered meaningless unless it includes in that solidarity the innocent victims who have suffered or have been destroyed in the past. He concludes the description with an injunction that the one who survives must forget nothing: "... neither the most cruel abandonment nor the faithful, hopeful and loving trust of the innocent victim. It is possible that the abandonment shall destroy the trust. That is nihilism! It is the great temptation of people living in the dialectic of late civil society. But there is *also the possibility that the trust will conquer the abandonment: the possibility of the fulfilled life, the good state the free humanity and the messianic redemption in God's Kingdom.*" (Siebert Ibid p 502. my emphasis) Clearly, this vision of hope feeds into the proleptic, holy, catholic and apostolic nature of the ecclesial community that is the normative context for both Davis's critical theology and Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics. Simultaneously, in his injunction not to forget Siebert it endorses the idea of anamnestic solidarity. It is on these points, indeed, that Davis's investigation of religious hope is, once more, so illuminating and in this setting of practical concern needs further elaborating.

<sup>73</sup> Davis RMS p 204.

<sup>74</sup> Davis Ibid p 204.

is as the divine promise which is, in turn, not made immediately to individuals on their own. Rather, the divine promise and hope are mediated through community. This brings us back to a consideration of community that Davis never fully embarked upon. He says only that:

“The revelatory events that ground Christian hope are at the same time the founding of a new level of community, namely, a community built upon a shared experience of the Transcendent. Even though it introduces a new level of communicative action, that community is not exempt from following the norms and values of all communicative action, and thus meeting the requirements of a communicative rationality.”<sup>75</sup>

It is in this light that Davis has endeavoured to relate the Christian values of faith, hope and charity to reason and its demands. In so doing he recognises the need for a normative interpretative community. Faith, hope and love come to us, he says, “... as the personal appropriation of the collective remembrance of a community, a collective remembrance that has accumulated a long historical experience, together with many attempts at its expression.”<sup>76</sup>

Understanding faith as remembrance, depends on the realisation that faith and tradition are, in fact, closely related. Moreover, in theological terms, the relationship is further reinforced in so far as faith is response to a divine initiative. The divine initiative that Davis refers to is none other than the self-disclosure of the transcendent as a saving reality in the face of the aporia created by death, thus hope grounded in anamnestic solidarity becomes the ‘assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.’<sup>77</sup> That this is the precise biblical definition

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<sup>75</sup> Davis *Ibid* p 205.

<sup>76</sup> Davis *TPS* p 150.

<sup>77</sup> Hebrews 11:1.



of faith is no mistake. That is not to say that the experience of the divine initiative exclusively affirms "...God as the Judaeo-Christian tradition presents him."<sup>78</sup> Making the argument for one particular religious tradition is more than the evidence can sustain. Nevertheless, Davis at this point moves to examine the method by which the experience of the transcendent in the face of the boundary situation of death is articulated. He concludes along with Metz and Peukert that narrative is, in fact, the primordial form of religious language.<sup>79</sup>

"Storytelling is the original and indispensable way of we articulate our understanding of they world and the self. Theories or rational argumentation can never abrogate primal narrative consciousness. But for that very reason, story telling is not primarily religious; nor is religious language to be identified exclusively with sacred stories for there are another forms. Storytelling is not exclusively religious. I am speaking of story telling ... as the basic articulation of individual and group experience. As such it is the primordial form of political as well as of religious language."<sup>80</sup>

This brings us back to an assertion we made in Chapter 3 to the extent that, for Davis, there is no special preserve for religious concerns. It is also the basis of his call to authentic political action, which is not merely administration but a process of communication among fully individual subjects in freedom. This, Davis contends, is a more humane and richer conception of politics acknowledging the essentially religious aspects of communicative action.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Davis TPS p 148 and his comments in RMS p 204.

<sup>79</sup> Davis TPS p 152.

<sup>80</sup> Davis TPS p 152 – 153.

<sup>81</sup> That narrative is the formal quality of experience and the fundamental category of expression is attested to in "Mayibuye iAfrika!" *A Grounded Theology of Land Restitution in South Africa*, D.S. Gillan. Edinburgh University. 1996. This is a fascinating, as yet unpublished, PhD thesis that argues by "foregrounding the voices of those who have been said wrongly to have been voiceless" (p35 – 36) that in the struggle to reclaim ancestral land of which a people were robbed under apartheid depends on narratives of suffering wherein the land itself becomes a *locus theologicus* as well as a medium for expression of the history and identity of the people. See also Stephen Crites



A curious correspondence, therefore, lies in the pastoral significance of the question of death. The pastoral significance itself lies in the realm of authentic political action. As we have noted Davis is at pains to maintain that politics is at heart "... an affair of communicative action..."<sup>82</sup> and as such it is subject to the aporia described above. Politics and religion, therefore, while they remain distinguishable, must rely on each other for their healthy functioning to the extent that religion is capable of closing the aporetic moment. Thus, we must conclude that, if the task of critical theology, as we have noted, is the recreation of society in the light of a practical way of life in response to the divine initiative, then such a society can only achieve a humane politics with religious interpretation. Hence the pastoral significance of the response to death relates to the language proper to religion and the possibility of an articulation of hope. While 'storytelling' is not exclusively religious, religious language as Davis points out, is not merely storytelling. It also depends on proverbs, lyrics, prayers, law texts and commentaries.<sup>83</sup> Religious language can not, and should not, be reduced to one type of expression or articulation, consequently it cannot, and should not, be locked into any one type of denominational or traditional discourse. Davis maintains that, in the final analysis, religious language points to mystery, and thus refers to God but not as something identifiable with any doctrinal orthodoxy.

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The Narrative Quality of Experience *Journal of The American Academy of Religion*. 1971. No. 39. pp 291 - 311. Crites also suggests that the formal quality of experience through time is narrative. He draws a similar distinction between mundane and sacred stories where the mundane, in Davis's terms relate the sphere of communicative action and the sacred to relates to religious stories. He further distinguishes between memory and recollection, a useful distinction in this context since faith as remembrance seems to tend more to active recollection rather than passive memorial. Nevertheless, he does not present such a sophisticated understanding of narrative as a two-order phenomenon as Davis does. Moreover he seems to conclude by giving greater significance to the sacred mode of storytelling concluding "[b]ut if we are really thinking of a sacred story what can we do but testify." p311. Note the similarity with Hauerwas's witnessing community of character.

<sup>82</sup> Davis TPS p 153.

<sup>83</sup> Davis TPS p 154.

This God of mystery is the ground of possibilities, and is experienced in and through grace:

“But that, clearly does not exhaust its content. In referring to God, it is also speaking to us about ourselves, about our lives, about the world. What, then, in general terms does it say about these matters? In other words, what distinguishes the religious mode of speech concerning the self, other people, the world, from other kinds of talk on the same topics? It is, I suggest, that religious language is an ever-renewed re-description of human experience and worldly reality according to unexpected and unformulable possibilities.”<sup>84</sup>

Thus, religious language provides a relational model relating humanity to the transcendent and each to the world. This model provides a description of human experiences and possibilities revealed in the divine initiative of the Transcendent.

Which brings us back to the application of hope in the face of suffering and death. The overcoming of the aporetic moment in communicative action is not something we can know anything about, it cannot be inferred from an inspection of human existence or reason, that is why Davis returns to talk of religious hope. As Davis says religious hope properly understood “... is contingent with the gratuitousness of a gift...,”<sup>85</sup> and authentic politics, therefore, is about imagined possibilities in dynamic relationship with the future actuality not yet realised. Thus, the imagining of alternatives is possible and so too is the possibility of liberation: liberation from the oppression of totalising, inauthentic politics and liberation from the aporia in communicative action caused by death. This is a

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<sup>84</sup> Davis TPS p 155 – 156.

<sup>85</sup> Davis RMS p 204.

position with tremendous political, theological and pastoral significance since it ties together the two aspects of proleptic and anamnestic solidarity.

If, however, as we suggest Davis's critical theology is successful in recognising and providing a remedy for the aporetic moment of communicative action then he creates a problem of his own. That is to say, he presents us with the problem of relating the 'horror and terror'<sup>86</sup> of nature and human history to the existence of a good God. That is to say, despite the fact that hope points to a transcendent reality, there is a practical and pastoral necessity to attempt to determine some characteristics of God and to aid in the articulation of hope. How, for instance do we affirm the essential goodness of creation, or anything else for that matter, in the face of suffering and tragedy? Theodicy, or relating the existence of a good God to the existence of evil, has a long and varied history. It is outwith the scope of this thesis to excavate this history. Nevertheless, we might venture to suggest that Hauerwas here provides a useful check and balance for Davis. We can turn to Hauerwas's understanding of truthfulness in an effort to close Davis's own theological aporia.

Turning to Hauerwas, then, we should note that the church should be a people offering an alternative history of ways of dealing with conflict, responding to violence and dealing with tragedy.<sup>87</sup> For Hauerwas tragedy represents the affirmation "... of a horrible bond between man and a greater fate than man's fate."<sup>88</sup> Hauerwas's understanding of tragedy betrays one of his basic assumptions about the nature of Christian existence. That is to say tragedy, understood not merely as unfortunate events but rather as the bond between humanity and its

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<sup>86</sup> Siebert *op.cit.*

<sup>87</sup> Hauerwas PK p 135.

<sup>88</sup> Hauerwas TT p 12.

greater fate, is a necessary characteristic of our lives. When a people loses touch with the tragic, "... we must redescribe our failures in acceptable terms. Yet to do so *ipso facto* traps us in self-deceiving accounts of what we have done."<sup>89</sup> In the face of these self-deceiving explanations Hauerwas relies on truthfulness whereby the truthful "... narrative is one that gives us the means to accept the tragic."<sup>90</sup> By truthful narrative he means, of course, the Christian narrative. Christian conviction, Hauerwas believes, should help people not to cure the tragic nature of human existence but to face up to it:

"For tragedy consists in the moral necessity of having to risk our lives and the lives of others in order to live faithful to the histories that are the only means we have for knowing and living truthfully."<sup>91</sup>

From this position Hauerwas can admonish the people of God for relying on compassion as a virtue in dealing with tragedy. Christians are formed, he says, by a "... harsh and dreadful love, but one we think truthful rather than the generalized forms of sentimentality we call compassion."<sup>92</sup> Clearly, if compassion is not an acceptable virtue for the people of God to exhibit then there must be an alternative. We noted in chapters 4 and 5 that the church, in Hauerwas's opinion, was called to realise the character of God. The politics of discipleship that this requires is informed by certain virtues. At the heart of it all though, lies hope and patience. Hauerwas suggests that hope creates a space for a truthful apprehension of the world and is based upon the understanding that God has already determined the course of history in the life, death and resurrection of Christ:

"Our unwillingness to employ violence to make the world 'better' means that we must often learn to wait.

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<sup>89</sup> Hauerwas TT pp 37 – 38.

<sup>90</sup> Hauerwas TT p 12.

<sup>91</sup> Hauerwas COC p 106.

<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas DFTF p 166.

Yet such waiting must resist the temptation to cynicism, conservatism or false utopianism that assumes that the process of history will result in everything coming out 'all right.' For Christians hope not in the 'processes of history' but in the God whom we believe has already determined the end of history in the cross and resurrection Christ."<sup>93</sup>

From this quote we can see that patience and hope are indispensable for facing tragedy truthfully. Interestingly, as we shall see, Hauerwas's reliance on hope in the face of tragedy bears a remarkable resemblance to Davis's.

For Hauerwas hope differs from optimism to the extent that optimism can exist separately from truth. As a result optimism can turn easily into nihilism. Hope on the other hand, is "... based on truth and forces the imagination to look for alternatives. If we are unable to look for alternatives we are forced to rely on power."<sup>94</sup> By power Hauerwas means complicity in the politics of violence which typify modern liberal polity. The politics of violence require the elimination of tragedy like death. The church, however, can and must be able to absorb such tragedies because it is a community trained in the habits and practices of hope. The only appropriate theological and pastoral response to tragedies such as suffering and death, therefore, is to learn how to live with them. Hauerwas contends that:

"... no account of the moral life which is worthy of our consideration can avoid asking us to endure suffering. Indeed, the morally interesting question is not whether we are asked to suffer, but how and for what we are asked to suffer."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Hauerwas PK p 145.

<sup>94</sup> Hauerwas CET p 201.

<sup>95</sup> Hauerwas SP p 25.

Hauerwas writes repeatedly on the topic of medical ethics. He perceives medicine as a useful example of the manner in which Christians might practically respond to suffering while Christianity provides for medicine a practical example of living with conviction.<sup>96</sup> The important aspect of this relationship lies in the fundamental task of the physician that parallels directly the Church's role in the world. That is to say the task of the physician is to care rather than to cure. Hauerwas says "[t]he physicians basic pledge is not to cure but to care through being present to the one in pain ...,"<sup>97</sup> whereas the constant temptation to the physician is to eliminate suffering. The task of the physician is, therefore, to bridge the gap between the sick and the healthy teaching the healthy about the frailty of our reason and facing tragedy. Thus the healthy and the sick are built into the same community. Similarly, by the way it is present to the sick, the dying and the suffering the church makes present the character of God and affirms the role of truthful, patient hope. It is precisely on this point, therefore, that Hauerwas's insights would prove useful to Davis. Making present the character of God, for Hauerwas, is about truthfulness and not propositional truth. Thus, living truthfully in light of our convictions, the guarantee given by God's self-disclosure, the object of human hope can be brought to bear on a situation of tragedy suffering or death. The goodness of God, in other words, depends almost entirely on the goodness and truthfulness of God's people. That truthfulness is most sustainable within a truthful community and the truthful community's role is not to make the world just but to let the world be the world. Thus, Davis's radical politic of action is modified and enhanced by Hauerwas's radical politic of presence.

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<sup>96</sup> See for example *Truthfulness and Tragedy*; *Suffering Presences*; "Killing Compassion" in *Dispatches from The Front*.

<sup>97</sup> Hauerwas SP p 51.



### 7.3.2. *Ecclesia of Discourse and of Character*

In this exploration what has become evident is the significance of hope for both critical theology and ecclesial ethics. In the face of the limiting experience of finitude Davis and Hauerwas both rely on an understanding of religious hope. For Davis it should be understood as the substantive content of the mystical moment of faith that leads directly to, and allows, authentic political action and closes the aporia in communicative action. For Hauerwas hope is best ‘articulated’ as patient presence that articulates the character of God. Curiously, though, For Hauerwas the very act of being present is, by definition, an action. Moreover it is an action that communicates. To this extent, therefore, Davis’s understanding and exposition of communicative action helps to flesh-out Hauerwas’s ecclesial ethics. On the other hand Hauerwas’s position helps to remind us that Davis’s authentic political action is a witness to the possibility of anamnestic existence and universal solidarity and the possibility of such an existence through the manner of one’s own communicative action. As such Hauerwas’s tactical deployment of ecclesial ethics allows Davis’s critical theology to move out of the theoretical realm to confront the realities of an embodied tradition where we live out our practical ways of life in response to the divine promise. As both Davis and Hauerwas believe, Christianity has much to offer society in its current predicament, but it will not commend itself to troubled and confused men and women if it hectors and condemns them, nor if it is bland and insipid.<sup>98</sup> Rather, it will commend itself, in the face of life’s irremovable negativities because the church, the people of God, is an ecclesia of both discourse and character, exploring the imagined possibilities for authentic political action and presence that displays both proleptic and anamnestic solidarity.

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<sup>98</sup> Holloway *Dancing on the Edge* p 122.



It is through action and presence that discourse and character, justice and virtue meet. Justice and Virtue do not meet in the center of the social and cultural desert nor do they meet in the ghetto. Rather they meet productively in an ecclesia of discourse and character in the margins "... from where it can speak truth to power and serve the life of the city more authentically."<sup>99</sup> Such an ecclesia may represent civility, authentic politics and virtue as challenging relevance to broader society.<sup>100</sup> As such the ecclesia of discourse and character is not a soft liberal option, nor is it a comfortable conservative bastion. By the very nature of its existence it represents an authentically active political voice, as well as an authentically present political witness to the society and culture in which they are set. The ecclesia of discourse and character presents a better way and is itself an instrument and locus of anamnestic solidarity in political struggle and proleptic solidarity in terms of Christian hope.

#### 7.4. Conclusion: Vision and Integrity in Practice

This thesis began by characterising the moral debate in history, and in the contemporary Western social and cultural context by saying that there was a choice between reason and tradition. This choice is evident in secular moral philosophical debate as much as in Christian ethical debate. It is true to say that theologians and church people, lay and ordained, inevitably and appropriately take sides and very few of us are disinterested. Generally speaking we support systems that confirm our virtues and ignore our vices, and we tend to identify the vices of those in opposition to us and ignore their virtues. There are two great values in human moral discourse: the value of freedom, on the side of the liberals and the value of authority on the side of the, so called, communitarians. These values

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<sup>99</sup> Forrester "The Place of The Church in the New Europe." In Jurjen Wiersma (ed.) *Discernment and Commitment*. 1993 Kok Pharos publishing House. Kampen, the Netherlands. pp 67 – 98.

<sup>100</sup> Forrester Ibid p 82.

provoke a tendency either to look for and defend liberal values or the tendency to take recourse in a normative tradition. They frequently conflict, and people often tend to characterise themselves by leaning towards one or the other.<sup>101</sup> It was in this light, as representatives of these conflicting camps, that I initially characterised Charles Davis and Stanley Hauerwas. The argument I developed, following careful exposition of their work and most importantly allowing it to speak for itself, however has shown that, although this dilemma is pressing, from the point of view of the authentic political presence and activity of the church, the real question is how to live on the margins, how to be creatively disaffiliated.

We have argued that, in this light, Davis and Hauerwas, who would normally have been assumed to be opposed to each other, in fact, provide not only complementary but mutually corrective calls for the ministry and mission of the church. In so doing the weaknesses of each might be overcome, while the strengths can be enhanced and make a positive contribution to the vision, integrity and practice of the church. I should make one further note and say that, in this present chapter, it has become clear that no matter what else critical theology or ecclesial ethics might be, they are not driven principally by either philosophy or dogmatics. The language of philosophy and dogmatics is indeed used to articulate their ideas. I would suggest, however, that since it has become clear that both critical theology and ecclesial ethics have led us to assert the necessary condition for authentic political presence and action is the *ecclesia* of discourse *and* character, then we are dealing with a practical ecclesiology. Finally, such a practical ecclesiology, as we have seen from Davis and Hauerwas, must be driven by both the transformative principle of faith and character. That is to say its proper concern and its grounding can only be fully realised in concrete pastoral and political situations. Hence, if

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<sup>101</sup> Holloway Ibid. p 58 – 59.

theology in future is to be driven by anything then it is to be driven by practical pastoral concerns, whereby authentic political presence and action becomes the contemporary mark of the holy, catholic and apostolic church.

The church, thus constituted, I would conclude is the locus of Christian reality that acknowledges love as foundational. It comes into being in response to the divine promise, proclaimed and heard. It is thus capable of engaging with the contemporary social and cultural world, and is not a world-denying sphere of hygienic righteousness. The authentic political presence and activity of the church will, therefore, be corrective.<sup>102</sup> That is to say in the manner of a teacher the corrective will be administered in an attempt to inform and transform, often by confrontation but never by indoctrination. Thus, the church in authentic political practice and presence, invoking the principles of reform and truthfulness at the heart of the ecclesia of discourse and of character, stands witness to the grace and character of God, rather than becoming an instrument of doctrinal orthodoxy and propaganda. This does not always mean maintaining either the tradition or a specific doctrine. It does mean constant and ongoing criticism and correction. In this manner the promises implicit in critical theology and ecclesial ethics are to be redeemed. Placing them together in the ongoing conversation will mean that each will provide a necessary and effective counter balance to the other, rescuing virtue from the ghetto and bringing justice in from the desert and placing them together in the ecclesia of discourse and character.

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<sup>102</sup> Gabriel Vahanian makes a similar comment with regard to Barth's theological agenda. *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary of the Apostles' Creed According to Calvin's Catechism*. p 11.

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